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**Can District and Charter School Partnerships Work? A Look At  
Emerging Collaborative Models**

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**Can District and Charter School Partnerships Work? A Look At  
Emerging Collaborative Models**

**by**

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**Treatise**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to God. Thank you for guiding my mind and hand through this process. Thank you for blessing me with the skills and fortitude necessary to finish this work.

Additionally, I dedicate this work to the world's most loving, supportive, caring, and loud family.

To my parents, Aaron and Carmen Dominguez, you taught me what hard work, grit, sacrifice, toughness, and love look like. Mom, thank you for instilling in me a passion for social justice through education. Dad, thank you for teaching me to be a man of faith and how to be a great father to my two boys.

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## **Abstract**

### **Can District and Charter School Partnerships Work? A Look At Emerging Collaborative Models**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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The model of competition has existed between district and charter schools for nearly thirty years and has been well researched; however, the idea of collaboration is still in its infancy and lacks deep academic study. Furthermore, the much-researched question of whether or not competition in the educational marketplace makes all schools better has, at best, produced mixed results (Knack and Knack, 2013; Jabbar, 2015). Therefore, as partnerships between charters and districts emerge we are compelled to study them. For this study, a single exploratory case study was used to explore a collaborative partnership between a district public school and a charter public school. The study attempted to answer the following research questions: (1) To what extent are the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust evident in each of the ten functions of school districts? (2) What do district-charter collaborative participants perceive about the influence of collaboration on school success? And (3) What changes have participants made to their practice as a result of their participation in a district-charter partnership? This qualitative study employed a single exploratory case study design. The qualitative data

collection process included semi-structured interviews and various documents. This single exploratory case study deepens the pool of literature on district-charter partnerships, identifies possible pitfalls and easy wins for school systems considering partnerships, and surfaces additional questions for future study.



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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Context of the Study**

School choice is currently a polarizing, politically driven, and highly debated topic (Reich, 2007; Khazem and Khazem, 2014; Swaby, 2017). Proponents of school choice argue families forced to attend failing neighborhood public schools should have the ability to attend higher quality schools of their choosing where attendance at the school should be paid for at least in part with government dollars (Camera, 2017; Strauss, 2017). Furthermore, they assert the influx of options in the marketplace will serve to improve all schools (Friedman, 1962; Malkus, 2017). Opponents of school choice often argue the influx of choice options only detracts from an already depleted school budget system and the privatization of the American school system is not the answer to improving all schools (Baddour, 2017; Strauss, 2017). Before we can fully explore the debate between school choice advocates and opponents; however, we must first understand the historical background of both our public school system and school choice options.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **History of public schools.**

Brian Fife (2013), in his book titled *Old School Still Matters: Lessons from History to Reform Public Education in America*, argues the idea of a free public education for all can be traced back to the infancy of our country in documents such as the Articles of Confederation of 1781 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Additionally, United States founding fathers Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson often articulated visions of a common school system educating all children of all genders (Fife, 2013). However, Horace Mann is commonly attributed with being the seminal leader who laid the foundation for a system of free public schools in this country. Mann, and other leaders of the time,

saw public education as a means to instill American and Protestant Christian virtues into the lower classes while simultaneously maintaining order in a budding industrial and immigrant society (Kramer, 2007).

While the Civil War caused major disruptions to the evolution of public schools, the schools were able to quickly rebound following the war and most states enacted compulsory school attendance laws for children to attend the more than four thousand schools in operation across the country by the end of the nineteenth century (Kramer, 2007). The 20th century began with a progressive movement in education and with it came an influx of vocational schools to prepare youngsters to join the workforce (Kramer, 2007; Semel, 2009). Semel (2009) argues that public schools during the early 20th century; focused on life-adjustment functions; did more to perpetuate social, race, and gender inequalities in our country than to fix them. This time period also saw the evolution of the modern school system; during the 1920s, more so in Northern states than in the South, schools made great improvements in terms of facilities, teacher salaries, and curriculum (Wagoner and Urban, 2009). Unfortunately, those efforts had large setbacks during the Great Depression years when school budgets were often decimated (Kramer, 2007).

Wagoner and Urban argue (2009) despite the tumultuous time in American history of WWI, the Great Depression, and WWII, American public schools emerged from the WWII years with continuity and minimal change in terms of school curricula, governance, teacher training, and instructional practices. They argue it was the years between 1945 and 1960 that were a much more crucial time for America's schools. These fifteen years saw teacher unions take a more assertive role for teacher rights, curriculum reform and an influx of federal dollars as a result of sputnik, and the issue of racial justice come to a head in the form of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Wagoner and Urban, 2009).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s emphasized racial equality in education. President Johnson waged a war on poverty by enacting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, our Department of Justice filed desegregation lawsuits against multiple urban school systems, and court-ordered busing occurred in Louisville and Charlotte-Mecklenberg (Kramer, 2007). These measures won only limited success and school equality was, and continues to be, a polarizing issue to this day. In the 1980s President Reagan took office, beginning a shift in educational policy. Reagan advocated for tuition tax credits for private school parents and the establishment of more school choice options across the educational marketplace (Wagoner and Urban, 2009).

Perhaps no other document has had a greater impact on the educational landscape than the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Its publication led to the charter movement, new accountability measures, the standards movement, and the idea schools should be evaluated by hard and fast metrics (Wagoner and Urban, 2009). Today, school and district grading systems seem to dominate the educational landscape and are a driving force of both political and educational initiatives.

### **History of school choice and the charter movement.**

Today school choice is a fixture of the educational and political landscape. For a variety of reasons, including the availability of day care, charter and private options, voucher programs, educational inequities, race, socioeconomic status, more and more families are taking advantage of school choice when determining where their children will attend school (Schneider and Buckley, 2002). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) today's range of school choice options has expanded greatly to include: magnet programs, inter-district choice plans, intra-district choice plans, charter schools, vouchers to attend private schools, and even includes the No Child Left Behind

public school choice provision allowing parents with children enrolled in a low performing Title I school to transfer, at the district's expense, to a non-low performing school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) more than 29 million kindergarten through twelfth grade children, or 52% of this country's K-12 student body, are enrolled in some type of school choice option. Despite the plethora of school choice options in the educational market today two choice options have taken center stage: vouchers and charter schools (Hoxby, 2003; Strauss, 2017).

### ***Vouchers.***

According to Hoxby (2003), a voucher is a publicly funded coupon a student can redeem at the school of his choice. In return, Hoxby (2003) continues, the school gets publicly funded dollars equal to the amount of the voucher. Vouchers are flexible and can be designed for use across the spectrum of both public and private schools. (Hoxby, 2003).

Gooden, Jabbar, and Torres (2016) remind us, while vouchers are currently a popular topic, they were birthed in the early 1950's out of resistance to desegregation. Leading up to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), states throughout the South took measures to close down public schools and use public dollars to fund all white private school options. Gooden, et al. argue these early incarnations of voucher programs were meant to systemically resist desegregation and exclude children of color from the United States public education system. Eventually, the landmark case of *Griffin et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (1964), which made its way to the State Supreme Court, ruled publicly funded voucher programs could not allow for private institutions of learning to discriminate on the basis of race or allow for the use of vouchers as a means of resisting desegregation (Gooden, et al., 2016).

The Federal Office of Economic Opportunity in Alum Rock, CA made an early attempt at a modern voucher program in 1972 (Carpenter and Kafer, 2012). Carpenter and Kafer (2012) argue this voucher system was initiated to serve low-income families in the community; it failed to deliver on its original vision, however, and is not considered a true success in the history of school choice. They argue voucher programs gained renewed momentum in the 1980's when they received the support of President Ronald Reagan. During his presidency, Mr. Reagan actively supported vouchers by submitting three separate voucher bills to Congress; his attempts failed to receive the popularity he hoped for (Carpenter and Kafer, 2012).

Vouchers, as we know them today, became prominent in 1990 when hundreds of parents exercised school choice through the country's first modern government sponsored voucher program entitled the Milwaukee Parent Choice Program (Witte, 2000; Ford, 2014). Originally the program was limited to just 1,000 students in nonsectarian schools; by 2014, the program grew to nearly 25,000 students across a variety of schools (Ford, 2014). The Milwaukee Parent Choice Program sparked national popularity. Currently, because of advocacy on the part of the current Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, and President Donald Trump, there are close to seventy and counting voucher programs across the country (EdChoice, 2017A; Turner, 2016; Alcindor, 2017).

### ***Charter Schools.***

A second, and increasingly popular, school choice option is the charter school. In the United States, more than three million students attend charter schools, representing more than a 100% increase in enrollment over the last ten years (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Charter schools are publicly funded schools of choice held to similar accountability measures as district schools; charter schools have the advantage

of receiving more freedom in terms of management and innovation (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017; Shen, 2011).

While the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) in no way recommended the privatization of education, it did create a sense of urgency around the need to improve American schools. This publication opened the door to a variety of innovations for improving education and was the catalyst for the ideals of Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers from 1964 to 1985 (United Federation of Teachers, 1999). In his National Press Club speech on March 31, 1988, Albert Shanker did not specifically use the term charter school or specifically detail the guidelines under which a charter school could come into existence. Shanker argued small groups of teachers should be given the opportunity to innovate by creating their own schools within already existing schools (Walter P. Reuther Library, 2017). Shanker argued these schools should be totally autonomous from the districts in which they existed and they should be encouraged and celebrated for innovating even if it ended in failure (Walter P. Reuther Library, 2017). Lastly, no teachers or parents would be mandated to work in or attend these schools but all would have the option to attend as they saw fit (Walter P. Reuther Library, 2017). These ideals, articulated in Shanker's inspirational speech would ignite the first iterations of charter schools in the United States.

In its first manifestation, the idea of a charter school was to decentralize portions of schools or districts to free them from administrative constraints and give them autonomy to implement original curriculum (Budde, 1996). From these initial decentralized concepts grew the idea of chartering entire schools whose purpose was, "...to offer change-oriented educators or others the opportunity to go either to the local school board or to some other public body for a contract under which they would set up an autonomous (and therefore

performance-based) public school which students could choose to attend without charge” (Budde, 1996).

Following the first public charter legislation enacted in Minnesota in 1991, legislation became rampant (De Luca and Wood, 2016). California enacted legislation the following year and Texas first authorized charters in 1995. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), as of the 2013-14 school year charter school legislation had been passed in forty-two states and the District of Columbia. Concurrently, charter schools were educating 2.5 million, or 5.1 percent, of public school students nationwide (NCES, 2016).

### **Current paradigm of charter and district coexistence.**

Al Shanker’s original vision of what we now call charter schools was something very different than what we have today. He envisioned a collaborative movement, driven by teachers, that could be a testing ground for innovations so all schools could celebrate and build to scale what was effective and be thankful and not try again when something failed (Walter P. Reuther Library, 2017). Unfortunately, the charter movement in this country has evolved into a movement more deeply rooted in competition than collaboration. Today the open market in education has evolved into a diverse and multi-faceted market including traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, and a variety of other options (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Milton Friedman (1962) first introduced us to the idea of privatization and competitive markets in education in his seminal piece, entitled *The Role of Government in Education*, more than a half century ago. Friedman (1962) relied on economic market theory to argue competition would both provide alternatives to dissatisfied families unable to afford private options while simultaneously forcing the public education system to

improve in order to sustain itself. Often relying on Friedman's foundational work, the educational marketplace has evolved into one predominantly focused on competition (Henig, 2001; Hoxby, 2003; Arsen and Ni, 2012).

Today charter schools and district public schools exist in the same communities. Their framework of coexistence is pervasively one of competition as they often compete for students and resources (Jabbar, 2015). This competition is built on the idea students attending schools of choice will receive a better education while students remaining in the traditional district school will also benefit as a result of competitive pressures (Maranto, Milliman, Hess, and Gresham, 2001). While the pervasiveness and effects of competition in the educational marketplace is well researched, and will be addressed in this paper, research on how traditional public schools are responding to competition is still limited (Jabbar, 2015; Holme, Carkhum, and Rangel, 2013).

#### **A collaborative framework for coexistence – The SKY partnership.**

While the majority of charter networks and traditional school districts are locked in competition, a handful of organizations have decided to challenge traditional frameworks to form collaborative partnerships. One such collaborative exists in Houston, TX and is called the SKY partnership. Beginning in the 2012 – 2013 school year Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD), YES Prep Public Schools (YES), and KIPP Houston Public Schools (KIPP) launched what is known as the SKY partnership. This innovative collaborative, supported and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, was established by these districts to accomplish three objectives: One, accelerate the transformation of the culture of a traditional public school system where every adult believes every child can and will pursue and complete higher education; two, non-traditional public school systems, i.e. charter schools, will learn how to scale while



maintaining quality and sustainability; three, the SKY Partnership and its best practices and lessons learned will be replicable with other similar partnerships across Texas and the nation (Davis, 2011).

The major governing document of the SKY partnership is the SKY Partnership Compact, which describes the process that brought the collaborative together. Conversations between the three organizational leaders began some four years prior to the beginning of the partnership and resulted in the development of a memorandum of understanding formally exploring the partnership. The memorandum called for a steering committee made up of executive level leaders from each of the three organizations. The steering committee then invited over 75 various stakeholders from across the three organizations to create working groups who began the process of providing input (Davis, 2011). The SKY partnership in SBISD is now entering its fifth year of existence and continues to be a place of sharing students, space, and resources.

### **Problem Statement**

While several partnerships have been established (Center for Reinventing Public Education, 2017) there remains a need to further explore collaborative relationships between public charter schools and traditional public district schools. The pervasive model of competition has existed between these two entities for nearly thirty years and has been well researched; the idea of collaboration, however, is still in its infancy and lacks a depth of academic study. Furthermore, the much-researched question of whether or not competition in the educational marketplace makes all schools better has, at best, produced mixed results. Some scholars argue the influx of charter schools into the competitive market is positive for students, communities, and/or contributes to better schools for all (Hoxby, 2003; Betts and Loveless, 2005) while others argue the effects are not necessarily

facilitating a better school experience for all students or the impact is minimal (Eastman, Anderson, and Boyles, 2016; Jabbar, 2015; Maranto, Millman, and Hess, 2001; Knack and Knack, 2013).

As collaborative efforts between charters and districts emerge we are compelled to study them and determine best practices for replication across the market place. Early studies show encouraging signs collaboratives can be effective. In their study on four district-charter partnerships, DeArmond, Nelson, and Bruns (2015) argue, “The co-location campuses described in this report show district and charter schools can, through considerable effort and with considerable resources, peacefully coexist. Our researchers found both sides can benefit...” (p. 1).

With student achievement as the primary goal of any collaborative effort between district and charter schools, an equally important issue requiring further exploration is how collaborative efforts are planned and implemented.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore a collaborative partnership between a district public school and a charter public school in order to determine what leadership and organizational issues and benefits arise as a result of said partnership. Additionally, this study will address participant perceptions about the partnership and identify evidence of the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation within Olivarez’s (2013) ten functions of school districts. This single exploratory case study will deepen the pool of literature on collaborative efforts between district public schools and charter schools, identify possible pitfalls and easy wins for superintendents considering collaborative partnerships, and raise additional questions for future study in regards to district and charter collaborative efforts.

For Sample District/Charter Collaborative, the following research questions will be used to guide the study:

1. To what extent are the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust evident in each of the ten functions of school districts?
2. What do district-charter collaborative participants perceive about the influence of collaboration on school success?
3. What changes have participants made to their practice as a result of their participation in a district-charter partnership?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Charter school.** Charter schools are publicly funded schools of choice held to similar accountability measures as district schools yet receive more freedom in terms of management and innovation (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017; Shen, 2011).

**Collaboration.** Collaboration is an organizational agreement characterized by two or more organizational entities coming together with mutual goals.

**Competition.** Competition in this paper refers to the competition that exists in the educational marketplace between district schools, charter schools, private schools, and other school choice options. The competitive pressures generated by choice schools fuel this market.

**District school.** District school refers to any non-charter, traditional public school located within the governing school district of a particular community.

**District/Charter partnership.** District/charter partnerships are formalized agreements between school districts and charter schools working to foster productive

relationships. Organizations in the partnership often work to share resources and best practices, commit to equity and common accountability, and aim to improve outcomes for all students in their cities (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2017).

**District/Charter collaborative.** See District/Charter partnership

**School choice.** School choice allows public education funds to follow students to the schools or services that best fit their needs—whether it is to a public school, private school, charter school, home school or any other learning environment parents choose for their kids (EdChoice, 2017B).

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the available literature on open markets in education used to support this study and explain in detail the elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation used as a guiding theoretical framework for my research. This chapter is organized as follows: Section one describes the economic relevance of this study and the evolution of competitive markets in education. Section two discusses the impact of competition on education. The next section explores collaboration as an alternative paradigm in the educational marketplace. The fourth section describes in detail the theoretical frameworks derived from social exchange theory and the ten functions of school districts. The chapter concludes with a discussion and conclusion.

### **ECONOMIC RELEVANCE AND THE EVOLUTION OF COMPETITIVE MARKETS IN EDUCATION**

Milton Friedman (1962) first introduced us to the idea of privatization and competitive markets in education in his seminal piece, entitled *The Role of Government in Education*, more than a half century ago. Friedman was an economist who vehemently promoted free markets, arguing they permitted “each to satisfy his own taste” (p. 94). He argued competition would both provide alternatives to dissatisfied families unable to afford private options while simultaneously forcing the public education system to improve in order to sustain itself (Friedman, 1962).

Friedman (1962) contended the current role of government in the United States insulated our education system from competition, stifled educational innovation, perpetuated the overpayment of poor teachers, and ensured the underpayment of good teachers. He believed these practices were unhealthy and were propagating inequality in regards to wealth, status, and access to quality education (Friedman, 1962). Friedman

(1962) argued these inequities could be overcome should education evolve into a free market place, offering both public and private school options for parents.

Friedman's (1962) proposal, an early iteration of a voucher system, allowed parents choosing to send their child to a private school to be paid a sum equaling the estimated cost of educating their child in the public school. This, Friedman (1962) argued, would eliminate the complaint parents sending their child to a private school have to pay for education twice and would simultaneously stimulate a competitive market in education, improving all schools.

When detailing his ideals for an open marketplace in education, Friedman (1962) argued, "Here, as in other fields, competitive enterprise is likely to be far more efficient in meeting consumer demand than either nationalized enterprises or enterprises run to serve other purposes" (p. 91). While Friedman did not yet know the competition eventually fostered by the charter world today, he did think of competition as a saving grace. Friedman (1962) believed a voucher system would create competition that could salvage America's education system, and provide hope to those fighting to rise above poverty. He argued, "It (a voucher system) would permit competition to develop. The development and improvement of all schools would thus be stimulated. The injection of competition would do much to promote a healthy variety of schools" (p. 93).

The competitive educational marketplace in the United States has grown and evolved since Friedman's (1962) initial introduction. While the educational marketplace is evolving the impetus for the evolution and change has remained relatively constant. Pro-school choice advocates believe, despite many attempts at reform, U.S. public schools are still not good enough. An often-favorite way of reforming or fixing struggling institutions in the U.S. is through the introduction of market pressures, which in the educational realm manifests itself through increased school choice options (Henig, 2001). Henig explains

the viewpoint of pro open market advocates as follows: if parents; who are dissatisfied with the quality of the school their children currently attend, are free to take their children to a different school of their choice, then all schools will be forced to improve their instructional programs or risk going out of business. While this model of school choice has both supporters and detractors, Henig argues much of its proliferation is rooted in the participation of advocates from every race, political party, and spectrum of the educational world.

## **RESULTS/IMPACT OF COMPETITION IN THE EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE**

It is clear contemporary educational reform relies heavily on supporting school choice to further the open market across the educational landscape. In fact, our last five United States presidents have advocated for school choice in some form or fashion (Camera, 2017). Most recently, President Donald Trump, has widely advocated for the growth of school choice options through his policy, cabinet appointments, and speech. Recently, President Trump, when calling for policy makers to support a new education bill, argued, “These families should be free to choose the public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home school right for them” (Kamenetz, 2017). This widespread support for a competitive market in education brings into question the results and impacts the influx of school choice has garnered thus far.

### **Leadership responses to competition.**

When determining if competition in the educational market improves the educational system as a whole, we must consider if district and school leaders are prepared to respond to competition in order to improve academic achievement. While the majority of school leaders are equipped with training and experience in the educational/curricular

realm they are generally not trained in market and economic theory. This could be problematic when school and district leaders are thrust into competitive market places.

Following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, LA, we had the opportunity to see the impact of a competitive market in the field of education. Jabbar's (2015) study on how choice creates school-level actions found of thirty schools studied in New Orleans, twenty-nine reported at least one competitor. Each of the twenty-nine reported using at least one strategy to combat the competition. Unfortunately, Jabbar (2015) found school leaders responded to these competitive pressures in a variety of ways and only a minority responded to competition by trying to improve the academic program in their schools. She found far more school leaders responded to competitive pressures by focusing on marketing techniques, promotional strategies, or even by carving out specific niches in the market as to avoid competition all together (Jabbar, 2015). While Jabbar (2015) admits the market place in New Orleans is a "critical case" and further study in more reasonable markets is needed, her study brings into question the foundational tenets of market theory in education. The study brings to light, when faced with extreme competition; school leaders do not automatically resort to improving their instructional program, thus benefitting the educational system as a whole.

Similarly, Arsen and Ni (2012) argue leadership responses to competition contain little resemblance to the benefits school choice proponents often tout. Additionally, Arsen and Ni (2012), like Jabbar (2015), argue leadership response to competition often includes marketing techniques or the creation of "niche" type schools or programs and competition rarely impacts significant change to a traditional public school's academic program.



### **Other impacts of competition in the educational market.**

A pervasive, and perhaps natural, inclination is to assume increased competition in the marketplace led to improvements in today's traditional public schools. Proponents of school choice assume competition applied to our public school system leads to benefits similar to those occurring in the private business sector when competition is introduced. Arsen and Ni (2012) reminded us presidential nominee John McCain's support of this compelling idea brought delegates to their feet at the 2008 Republican National Convention when he declared, "Education is the civil rights issue of this century. Equal access to public education has been gained. But what is the value of access to a failing school? We need to shake up failed school bureaucracies with competition. Empower parents with choice" (p.94).

Arsen and Ni (2012) report school choice advocates, and more specifically charter school advocates, often argue competition in the educational market place leads to benefits for both those exercising school choice and those remaining in their neighborhood public school. Arsen and Ni (2012) argue, however, current research does not support the claim competition improves traditional public schools as they state, "The weight of existing evidence, however, fails to indicate the competitive threat posed by charter schools induces consistent or substantial improvements in public school districts" (p. 118). Arsen and Ni (2012) go on to warn, "policy makers should remain wary about suggestions that large, systemic improvements would result from major increases in the number of charter schools" (p.119).

Maranto, Milliman, Hess, and Gresham (2001) also argue there is little to no empirical evidence supporting the claim increased competition in the marketplace improves district public schools. They found competition fosters only minute change in

district public schools, short-term impacts are not great, and observed changes may or may not be effective (p. 139).

Bulkley and Henig (2015) argue despite being 30 some years removed from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* little has changed in terms of performance improvement and many of the original reform options, such as charter schools, have begun to lose their luster. Given the significant body of work on competition in the market place and the lack of significant impact on district public schools competition has provided, we logically should look more intently at existing collaborative efforts between charter schools and district public schools in the educational marketplace.

#### **COLLABORATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE**

The preponderance of findings and arguments inconsistent with the idea competition in the educational marketplace leads to improved traditional public schools is substantial and requires exploration of other models besides competition. The educational landscape does not seem to behave as a traditional economic market where one competitor succeeds at the cost of another failing. Bulkley and Henig (2015) argue given the aforementioned reforms that have received, at best, mediocre results, the time is right for portfolio or collaborative models of school districts.

Funding for public schools in Texas is in regressive trend (Villanueva, 2013) and despite lawsuits challenging our state's funding method, change is slow or nearly absent. Given these dire circumstances, charter networks and public school districts have an opportunity to cut their marketing budgets, pool resources, share physical space, and reallocate funds collaboratively in order to improve their bottom line, the academic achievement of children.

## **Collaboration defined.**

Hord (1986) asserts few can argue collaboration is not valuable or needed in almost every aspect of work and society. Defining it and distinguishing it from cooperation is more complex. As we begin to explore collaborative models in both other industries and education, it is important to first clearly define collaboration and tease out applicable frameworks relating to educational collaborations. This will provide us with a clear lens as we explore the literature and next steps.

Appley and Winder (1977), in their work on collaboration in the workplace, define collaboration as a relational value system in which:

1) Individuals in a group share mutual aspirations and a common conceptual framework; 2) the interactions among individuals are characterized by “justice as fairness”; and 3) these aspirations and conceptualizations are characterized by each individual’s consciousness of his/her motives toward the other; by caring or concern for the other; and by commitment to work with the other over time provided that this commitment is a matter of choice (p. 281).

Schaffer and Bryant (1983) in their study on the structures and functions of collaboration define collaboration as follows:

Collaboration refers to shared decision-making in governance, planning, delivery, and evaluation of programs. It is a pluralistic form of education where people of dissimilar backgrounds work together with equal status. It may be seen as working with rather than working on a person (p.3).

Given the body of work on defining collaboration and the synthesizing of literature by Hord (1986), a fair definition for the purpose of this paper is an organizational agreement characterized by two or more organizational entities coming together with mutual goals. Both groups take action and assume risks in a shared exchange of skills and

assets for the betterment of all organizations involved. One industry that has embraced collaborative efforts as a means of systemic improvement is the healthcare industry.

According to Gitlin, Lyons, and Kolodner (2006), the healthcare industry has turned to collaborative efforts with other entities as a means of efficiently developing research, broadening the scientific base of knowledge and overcoming limited financial and personnel resources (as cited in Englehardt and Evans, 1988; Findley, Daum and Stineman, 1990; Labovitz, 1986; Pranger and Brown, 1990; Yerxa, 1987). Gitlin et al. define collaborative teamwork, “as an in-depth cooperative effort in which experts from diverse disciplines, clinical experiences or settings work together to contribute to the study of a problem” (pp. 16). They argue members of the collaborative team are linked so they build on each other’s strengths, backgrounds and experiences and together develop an integrative approach to solving a research or educational problem (Gitlin et al., 2006).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **Social exchange theory.**

Two theoretical frameworks were used to explore a collaborative partnership in Southeast Texas between a district public school and a charter school. The first relied on the work of Gitlin, Lyons, and Kolodner (2006). In their piece titled, *A Model To Build Collaborative Research Or Educational Teams Of Health Professionals In Gerontology* Gitlin, et al. (2006) rely on social exchange theory and the literature on team building to tease out four key elements as the foundation for their five-stage model of collaboration. The four key elements, which makeup the theoretical framework used in this study, are exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation.

Blau (1964), in his foundational piece on social exchange theory titled *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, first brought together the ideas of exchange, negotiation, trust,

and differentiation of power. These four concepts, anchored in the literature around social exchange theory and team building, became the cornerstones of Gitlin et al.'s (2006) model for collaborative research or educational teams. They lean on social exchange theory for their model because, according to Gitlin et al. (2006), "it offers us a perspective from which we can interpret the process occurring as individuals meet to form working groups" (pp. 18).

According to Gitlin et al. (2006), the process of exchange suggests individuals join work groups because of potential benefits they may reap as a result of membership. Simultaneously, there is an expectation by the group the individual member will contribute something to help the group achieve its goals as well (Gitlin et al., 2006). Thus, a continuous and reciprocal relationship develops where individuals contribute to the goals of the group in exchange for desired individual benefits as a result of group membership (Blau, 1964).

Gitlin et al. (2006), argue the process of negotiation relies on the idea each individual brings skills that vary in value to the group and cost to the individual. Both the individuals and the group as a whole are seeking to maximize the value to themselves, minimize their individual cost, and maintain a fair and equal exchange (Gitlin et al., 2006).

Gitlin et al. (2006) rely on team building literature, in addition to social exchange theory, to develop the concepts of trust and role differentiation for their collaborative model. They argue trust, support, and cooperation are prerequisite conditions of effective work groups (as cited in French and Bell, 1984) because they allow members to feel confident they will receive adequate benefits for the investments they make while simultaneously fostering creative thinking and risk taking.

Finally, Gitlin et al. (2006) use the concept of role differentiation as the final cornerstone for their model. They argue role differentiation allows each member of the

collaboration to be responsible for specific behaviors and tasks for which he or she is best suited. According to Gitlin et al. (2006), this differentiation allows each member to have clear expectations about themselves, what others are responsible for, and how all of it fits together to accomplish the group goal (as cited in Jacobs, 1970).

### **Framework of district functions and leadership competencies of school superintendents.**

In addition to social exchange theory, the framework of district functions and leadership competencies of school superintendents was used as a theoretical framework to organize data collected in this study. For the remainder of this paper this framework will be referred to as “The ten functions.” Ruben Olivarez (2013) explains the ten functions are critical roles in a school system collectively making up the totality of the institutions operations. Olivarez argues the ten functions are the primary responsibility of the superintendent and it is his/her responsibility to ensure they are effectively performed in the school system. For this reason the ten functions, in concert with social exchange theory, provided the ideal frameworks for analyzing data in this case. Overlaying these two frameworks allowed the researcher to not only address elements of collaboration, but also identify examples within a school system where collaboration is or isn’t happening successfully in the case. The data then is even more useful for superintendents and district leaders as they explore the possibility of future collaboration.

These ten functions, critical to the stability and success of any school system, are represented in Figure 1 below. The functions include (1) governance operations; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) elementary and secondary campus operations; (4) instructional support services; (5) human resources; (6) administrative, finance, and business operations; (7) facilities planning and plant services; (8) accountability,

information management, and technology services; (9) external and internal communications; and (10) operational support systems—safety and security, food services, and transportation (Olivarez, 2013).

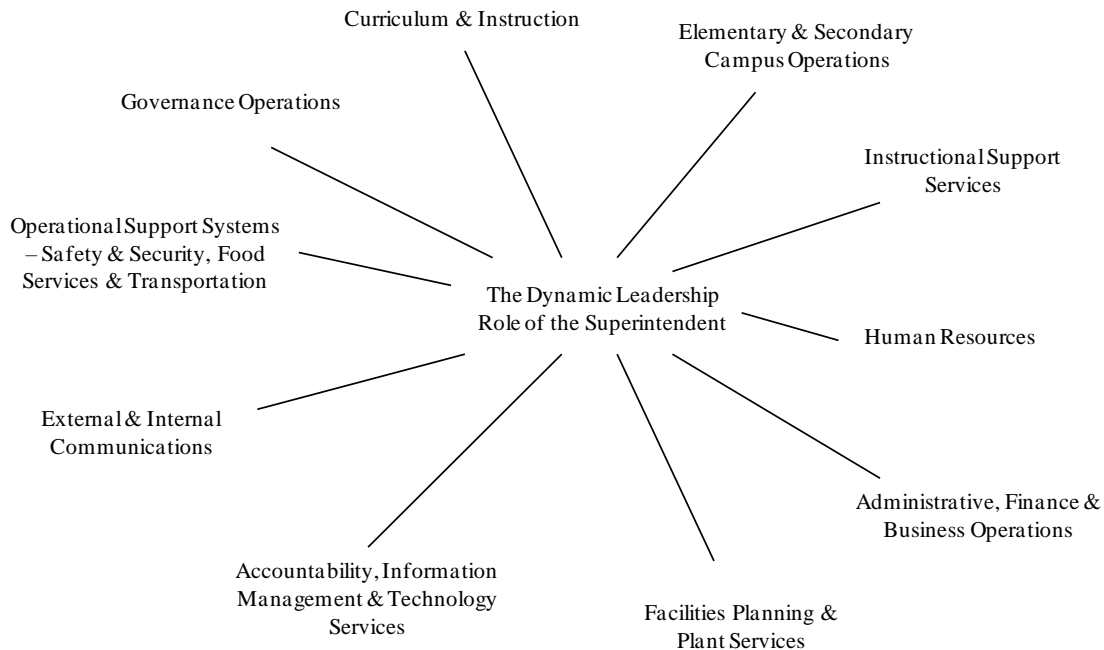


Figure 1. Framework of district functions and leadership competencies of school superintendents (Olivarez, 2013).

### ***Governance operations.***

This function relies on Texas Education code to guide the duties and responsibilities of school boards and superintendents. Vital to this function are the district processes for developing and approving policies, development of a strategic plan, and resource allocation. The school board, superintendent, and his/her leadership team are responsible for the execution of this function (Olivarez, 2013).

***Curriculum and instruction.***

This function is responsible for campus implementation of state adopted curriculum. The function includes the necessary curricular adjustments, resources, planning, and professional development necessary for teachers to carry out daily objective driven lessons aligned to state standards (Olivarez, 2013).

***Elementary and secondary campus operations.***

This function is responsible for systemically coordinating the planning and monitoring of progress towards the overall educational mission. Planning and monitoring includes consideration of student special populations, behavioral needs, and learning differences. This function also includes the operation of specialized campuses and magnet programs supporting students with special and/or unique needs (Olivarez, 2013).

***Instructional support services.***

This function covers the implementation of related services in alignment with the districts overall instructional plan. Such services often include, but are not limited to: psychological and social emotional counseling, library services, extra-curricular programming, health services, and student and family support services (Olivarez, 2013).

***Human resources.***

This function handles employee relations, hiring, compensation, monitoring, evaluation, and termination. Human resources (HR) must collaborate with district campuses and departments to determine their unique needs and coordinate staffing (Olivarez, 2013).



***Administration, finance, and business operations.***

This function is responsible for the leadership, management, and oversight of all district finances. This includes day-to-day operations, purchasing, accounts payable, payroll, budget development, monitoring, and evaluation (Olivarez, 2013).

***Facilities planning and plant management.***

This function is responsible for the evaluation and maintenance of existing facilities. Additionally, it includes facility planning, construction, facility infrastructure, planning for changes in enrollment, and ensures facilities stay in compliance with policy changes and environmental demands (Olivarez, 2013).

***Accountability, information management, and technology services.***

The function handles all data collection and analyses to ensure the system is meeting and/or addressing the multi-faceted local, state, and federal accountability measures. It is responsible for maintaining the technological systems and structures necessary to collect appropriate data and share it accordingly (Olivarez, 2013).

***External and internal communications.***

This function exists to project a positive image to all external stakeholders while simultaneously communicating district events, calendars, and activities with the utmost transparency. Additionally, the function supports internal communication between campuses, departments, and/or central office (Olivarez, 2013).

***Operational support systems.***

This function handles the basic needs of a school system including: safety and security, food services, and transportation services. These structures must be planned for,

executed, evaluated, maintained, and constantly improved so they function with excellence. If any of these sub-functions are outsourced, this function is responsible for the management and quality assurance of the third party vendor (Olivarez, 2013).

As data in this study was collected and analyzed, the ten functions were applied in conjunction with the aforementioned four elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation. These elements provided an ideal approach to this qualitative research study aiming to explore and make sense of the collaborative partnership at Sample District/Charter Collaborative.

## **DISCUSSION**

The body of literature promotes the idea educational policy makers should be open to further exploring and supporting collaborative partnerships in the marketplace. Competition in the open market place has, at best, only minimally improved the quality of district public schools. Furthermore, the literature has begun to establish that effective partnerships between traditional public schools and charter schools do exist. Appley and Widner (1977) argue in order for stakeholders to make the shift from competitive models to collaborative models people must, “be conscious of the inadequacy of the old value system; second, be aware that there is an alternative; and finally, be convinced that s/he can choose between these value systems” (p. 281). Therefore, the prerequisites for a shift in the educational marketplace from competition to collaboration have been established.

The current research on portfolio districts clearly defines what is needed to establish meaningful partnerships between districts and charters. Strong leadership (DeArmond et al., 2015), clarity around roles and accountability (DiMartino, 2012), and political backing (Yatsko, Nelson, and Lake, 2013) are certainly important factors. However, the literature seems to fall short of providing empirical research on the instructional impact of district

and charter collaboratives. DeArmond et al. reports while co-located schools showed improvement in the area of school culture they found improving instruction through collaborative efforts was challenging and would require further work than either entity was prepared for (p. 3).

Though a significant foundational piece of improving schools relies on school culture, other systems must also be in place. The perceived lack of collaboration around instruction in district and charter partnerships is concerning and is an area needing further examination. While the literature reveals uncommon planning times, differences in curricula and teaching practices, and speculation about instructional approaches as root causes to why collaboration around instruction is slow going (DeArmond et al., 2015), I could not find solid plans in these collaborative efforts detailing when instructional collaboration will begin. DeArmond et al. confirms the lack of clarity around next steps by arguing, “But using co-location to get to *school improvement* is a daunting task that involves costs and benefits that are, to date, neither fully realized nor, perhaps, fully understood by either side (p. 1).”

While not an easy or simple undertaking, the emergence of District-Charter partnerships is exciting evidence that public school districts, charter networks, and the private sector are beginning to think differently about the competitive markets within education over the past 50 years. Bulkely and Henig (2015) recommended that, given the lackluster results of previous reform models the time is right for a new model to enter the national reform movement. Collaborative efforts between the various educational institutions have taken seed, and while still early there is promise these collaborations can be successful and sustained.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research on competitive markets in education indicates the impact of competition in the educational marketplace on school quality is minimal at best. However, competition in the marketplace, especially from charter schools, seems here to stay (Betts and Loveless, 2005). Therefore, there are implications for leaders of both school districts and charter networks to further explore more fruitful options of coexistence, including the idea of working collaboratively. Further research is needed to determine the effects of District-Charter collaborative models so school leaders from both the charter and traditional district world can make informed decisions as they wade into collaboration with each other. As collaborative models take hold, it is imperative these efforts are successful and result in greater school success for all parties involved.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter describes the exploratory case study design used to conduct this qualitative study. Included in this chapter are: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, sampling method, data collection and analysis, the strengths and limitations of the methods, trustworthiness and quality, positionality, ethical considerations, and significance. The following sections of this chapter detail the characteristics and rationale for each component of the study.

### **EPISTEMOLOGY**

For the purpose of this exploratory case study, the constructionist epistemological stance was used. The constructionist epistemological stance asserts that meaning is not discovered or predicted but that people construct meaning as they engage with the world around them (Crotty, 1998). This exploratory case study seeks to understand how participants construct their reality as they experience collaboration with another educational entity. Crotty (1998) argues that constructionism confronts reality as constructed by the interaction of humans and their world making it a logical epistemological choice for an exploratory study seeking to understand how people make sense of an behave in a collaborative environment.

Crotty (1998) argues objects may “be pregnant with potential meaning” however that meaning does not surface until individuals engage and interact with that object. In this case study the idea of collaboration may be “pregnant with meaning;” however, that meaning does not come to light until people interact and engage with it. Only then can meaning be made of collaborative efforts between charter schools and district schools in education.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Interpretivism is a logical theoretical perspective to assume when conducting this exploratory case study seeking to understand a collaborative effort between two schools. Since collaboration is a relational value system that involves both personal and group motives (Appley and Winder, 1977), a paradigm relying on the idea that meaning for participants is only formed through engagement and not simply enforced (Creswell, 2013) is ideal.

Since Interpretivism asserts that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live, research under this paradigm, relies heavily on human interaction and each participant's view of their situational reality (Creswell, 2013).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, a single exploratory case study was used to explore the concept of collaboration in a partnership between a traditional district school and a charter school. A case study is an inquiry method that explores a bounded contemporary phenomenon under real world circumstances through the collection of multiple data sources (Yin, 2009; Stake, 2005). Yin (2009) adds that case studies have more variables of interest than data points and that each result relies on multiple triangulated pieces of evidence. In this particular study, collaboration was the phenomenon of focus. While competition is a common theoretical concept of focus in studies covering the educational marketplace, the concept has been exhausted in previous studies and is covered extensively in the previous chapter. The lack of extensive preliminary research on collaboration in the marketplace was an impetus for this study and provides ideal conditions for an exploratory case study (Streb, 2012).

Yin (2009) outlines three types of case studies: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Exploratory case studies are most applicable when there is a lack of preliminary research on a topic and when there is a need to define questions and hypothesis for consecutive studies (Streb, 2012; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, exploratory case studies are best suited for studies with “what” research questions (Yin, 2009). Given the nature of the research questions explored in this study and the lack of previous research on collaboration between district and charter schools, an exploratory case study was ideal.

A single case study, as opposed to a multiple case study, provides the opportunity to obtain the level of intimacy with participants that is needed for quality qualitative research. Creswell (2013) argues that knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people; therefore, the closer we as researchers get to our subjects the better we actually “know what we know” based on the real world experiences we have with participants (p. 20). While a multiple case study would allow for greater generalizability, it could impede the depth of experiences between researcher and participant.

## **SAMPLING METHOD**

A combination of criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling method was used for this study. Creswell (2013) describes maximum variation sampling as a common qualitative sampling method where the researcher determines criteria in advance in order to differentiate participants and then selects participants who are quite different based on said criteria. Additionally, he defines criterion sampling as a process that selects all cases meeting a particular set of criterion (Creswell, 2013). These particular types of samplings are applicable for this case study due to the small sample size available from which to choose.

By employing a maximum variation sampling method the study was able to best describe multiple perspectives on collaboration in the Sample District/Charter Collaborative. In addition, participants met certain criteria in order to assure quality of data. For this study, participants from each of the following groups were interviewed: Sample District and Sample Charter executive level leaders, District Middle School and Charter Middle School level leaders, and District Middle School and Charter Middle School teachers. For the purpose of this study executive level leaders are defined as leaders that work from a central office and support school functions in some form or fashion. School level leaders may include principals, assistant principals, or other non-teacher members of the campus leadership team that have department head or appraisal duties. Teachers will be defined as instructors within a core content area including math, reading, language arts, social studies, or science. From each of the aforementioned groups participants were chosen with varying levels of tenure in Sample District/Charter Collaborative.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Data collected for this case study includes a combination of interviews, reflective journaling, and Sample District/Charter Collaborative documents. The details regarding interviews and sampling methods are described above. There were two policy documents governing the partnership that were applicable to the research questions for this study and provide a rich data source. The first document used for data collection was the Sample District/Charter Collaborative's main governing document, which has been given the pseudonym "Document 1." Document 1 clearly outlines the policies governing the various entities at play in the partnership, the guiding principles of the partnership, and memorializes how and why the partnership was established.



A second document used as a data source is the Campus Program Charter Contract between Sample District and Sample Charter. This document goes into detail about the many policies governing the collaboration between Sample District and Sample Charter including: relationship of the parties, student recruitment and eligibility, facilities, program description, support services, curriculum and instruction, student discipline, faculty and staff, data and communications, evaluation and accountability, fiscal affairs, safety and security, and other legal matters.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with district level leaders, school leaders, and teachers. The interviews addressed each participant's perspective on the partnership's alignment to the elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation within the ten functions of schools. Additionally, interviews explored how participants perceive the influence of collaboration on their level of success and what changes they have made to their practice as a result of said collaboration.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Evers and van Staa (2012) argue qualitative studies involve a wide array of data sources that must be systematically dissected and interpreted so that the researcher can accurately present findings and answer his/her research questions. Therefore, they argue, data analysis is an ongoing process of education and reconstruction allowing the researcher to understand from within what is important in a case (Evers and van Staa, 2012).

The data analysis for this case began by transcribing verbatim interviews with all stakeholders using Gotranscript and then uploading them into Dedoose. Policy documents were also uploaded for coding. Codes included the elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation from social exchange theory. Codes were then organized into themes from the ten functions of school districts (Olivarez 2013). Once all data sources

were coded, they were placed in a frequency table and their relevance to the study's research questions was discussed. Throughout the process extensive memoing was used to keep track of interesting findings and to guide the analysis process.

## **STRENGTHS**

The single instrumental case study of collaboration in Sample District/Charter Collaborative positioned me to infiltrate the collaborative experience. By focusing on just one school I was able to better infiltrate the ranks of various staff members and spend a substantial amount of time amongst various stakeholders referenced by the data. This allowed me to get to know my data sources on a more intimate level and better learn from their authentic interaction in Sample District/Charter Collaborative.

Through this more intimate setting I was able to make sense of and use a constructionist epistemological stance in order to construct knowledge with my subjects more thoroughly in their social context. Creswell (2013) argues that knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people; therefore, the closer we as researchers get to our subjects the better we actually “know what we know” based on the real world experiences we have with participants (p. 20). If I had conducted a more comprehensive case study of partnerships, while it may have allowed for generalizability, I do not believe that I would have been able to obtain the level of intimacy with participants that Creswell argues is needed for quality qualitative research.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODS**

A common criticism of case study research is that the researcher can be free from methodological considerations and be free to take on a freeform (Yin, 2009). This concern

is one shared by many quantitative researchers. Therefore, it was critical that this study be systemic in nature and proceed with clarity during the data collection and analysis process.

Given that this study was a single case study there were limitations in terms of replicability and reliability. One might wonder how it is that one case can offer anything of substance. This seems to be an unavoidable limitation to any single case study. It is important to remember the purpose of an exploratory case study, however, which often seeks to set precedent for a particular field and/or provide guidance for future studies.

### **TRUSTWORTHINESS AND QUALITY**

In order to address any issues with trustworthiness or validity, I used verbatim interviews and transcription, triangulation, and clarified my researcher bias and positionality from the onset. Using multiple data sources enables triangulation and increases validity of the case study (Aaltio and Heilmann, 2012). While one to one semi-structured interviews will be a foundational piece of evidence, they will be triangulated with governing documents of the district/charter partnership.

In addition to these strategies, Aaltio and Heilmann (2012) argue that proceeding through a case study systematically from one stage to the next ensures the validity and reliability of the study. Therefore, this case study followed a logical and thoughtful research process of selecting the case study objects, ensuring entrance to the site, outlining a clear theoretical frame, and data gathering, processing, and analyzing (Aaltio and Heilmann, 2012).

### **POSITIONALITY**

Positionality refers to the stance of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study and impacts all aspects of the research process (Coghlan and

Brydon-Miller, 2014). My positionality as a minority, studying a partnership aimed at closing the achievement gap, in a district similar to those in which I have worked was at the forefront of my mind as I conducted research. As a former principal in the public education system and aspiring superintendent, I do have a bias regarding the attributes of effective partnerships in schools and have an inherent interest in the success of the district-charter partnership as a whole.

While the majority of my career has been spent in the public sector, I have participated in comprehensive leadership training with an organization called Building Excellent Schools (BES). BES' mission is to train high-capacity individuals to take on the demanding and urgent work of leading high-achieving, college preparatory urban charter schools. Through my extensive training with BES, I became intimately aware of the systems and structures at play in a highly effective charter network. In the years that followed I implemented many of the learned practices from my training into my work in public schools and found them to be highly effective. This experience leads me to a position of deeply valuing the work of both effective charter and public schools while inherently hoping to find and spread successful collaborative partnerships.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The major ethical considerations at play were rooted in the bias outlined in the previous section on positionality. It was paramount for me to disclose my previous experiences with both district schools and charter schools to avoid any perception of mal intent. Additionally, I strongly considered the issue of anonymity. I made certain all participants were able to share freely about their experiences in the collaborative partnership and not fear any retribution. The collaborative partnership under consideration in this study has substantial political backing and financial investment from local and

national players. Therefore, people needed to know their identity would not be revealed as they shared about their experiences.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The research on competitive markets in education indicates the impact of competition in the educational marketplace on school quality is minimal at best. Competition in the marketplace, however, especially initiated by charter schools, is here to stay. Therefore, there are implications for leaders of both school districts and charter networks to further explore more fruitful options of coexistence, including the idea of working collaboratively in some shape or form. Further research is needed to determine the effects of District-Charter collaborative models so school leaders from both the charter and traditional district world can make informed decisions as they collaborate. As collaborative models take hold, it is imperative that these efforts are successful and result in greater school success for all parties involved.

The current breadth of available literature on district-charter partnerships is minimal when compared to available literature on competition. This study aims to broaden the literature base regarding district-charter partnerships so that future researchers and practitioners can be better informed as they proceed. Additionally, this study will identify participant perceptions about partnerships and evidence of the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation. This analysis will be helpful for future district and charter leaders as they consider partnerships in the future.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

Traditional district public schools and public charter schools have coexisted for more than thirty years. During that time, their coexistence has been dominated by a paradigm of competition over students, funding, political support, and other resources. The idea this competition has made all schools better is debatable and should encourage us to explore a model of coexistence founded in collaboration. Such collaborations are few; however, several are well established, have experienced success, and demand further exploration and, proliferation.

The purpose of this study was to explore a collaborative partnership between a district public school and a charter public school in order to determine what leadership and organizational issues and benefits arise. Additionally, this study identifies participant perceptions about the partnership and offers evidence of the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation within each of Olivarez's (2013) ten functions of school districts. This single exploratory case study will deepen the pool of literature on collaborative efforts between district public schools and charter public schools, identify possible pitfalls and easy wins for superintendents contemplating collaborative partnerships, and raise additional questions for future study.

The following research questions were used to guide the study: (1) To what extent are the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust evident in each of the ten functions of school districts? (2) What do district-charter collaborative participants perceive about the influence of collaboration on school success? And (3) What changes have participants made to their practice as a result of their participation in a district-charter partnership?

The previous chapter described in depth the methodology used to explore the collaborative partnership between a district public school and a charter public school.

Chapter four will present the findings from the study. This exploratory case study used a combination of semi-structured interviews, founding and guiding documents of the partnership, and reflective journaling and memoing as data sources. Chapter four will describe each of the ten participants serving at the district public middle school and charter public middle school involved in the partnership. Data collected will be shared and then elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation will be described in relation to each of the ten functions of school districts.

The partnership will be represented by the pseudonym Sample District/Charter Collaborative. The school district in Sample District/Charter Collaborative will be represented by the pseudonym Sample District. The Charter Network in Sample District/Charter Collaborative will be represented by the pseudonym Sample Charter. The district public school in Sample District/Charter Collaborative will be represented by the pseudonym District Middle School. The charter public school in Sample District/Charter Collaborative will be represented by the pseudonym Charter Middle School. Additionally, each of the participants will be represented by pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of all participants and to promote trustworthiness.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

A total of ten educators participated in this study including four organization level leaders, four campus level leaders, and two teachers. Half of these participants came from Sample District while the other half came from Sample Charter. Participant tenure in Sample District/Charter Collaborative varied and each participant is described below.

**Sample district.**

Five participants from Sample District participated in semi-structured interviews. The interviewees included two Sample District organizational level leaders (Mr. Yen and Ms. Sale), two District Middle School level leaders (Ms. Retz and Ms. Olden), and one District Middle School teacher (Ms. Dawn).

**Charter Middle School.**

Five participants from Sample Charter participated in semi-structured interviews. The interviewees included two Sample Charter organizational leaders (Ms. Vargas and Mr. Jefferson), two Charter Middle School leaders (Mr. Snow and Ms. Thatcher) and one Charter Middle School teacher (Ms. Apple).

**CODES AND THEMES**

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim using Gotranscript. All documents were then uploaded to Dedoose for analysis using a prefigured coding process. Preexisting codes, defined in the previous chapter, of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation were derived from social exchange theory and used during the initial coding of interview transcriptions, reflective journals, and organization documents. During the data analysis, the aforementioned codes were organized into themes surrounding the ten functions of school districts. The ten functions provided an ideal platform for further organizing data, codes, and making sense of the case study. The functions, defined in the previous chapter, include (1) governance operations; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) elementary and secondary campus operations; (4) instructional support services; (5) human resources; (6) administrative, finance, and business operations; (7) facilities planning and plant services; (8) accountability, information management, and technology services; (9) external and internal



communications; and (10) operational support systems—safety and security, food services, and transportation (Olivarez, 2013).

## RESULTS

Below is a summary of participant responses during the semi-structured interviews. Table 1 describes the responses of the four organizational level leaders interviewed during the study; Table 2 describes the responses of the four campus level leaders interviewed, and Table 3 describes the responses of the two teachers interviewed for this study.

Table 1: Organizational Leader Response Summaries

Question	Summary of Responses	
	District	Charter
How long have you been in your current role?	Two years; five years	Four years; one year
How would you describe your roles and responsibilities in your current role on your campus?	Lead strategic work for the district; accountability and measures; school level support	Lead campus and system level operations; Manage five campuses; Managing principals and their overall academic achievement
How would you describe the current partnership that exists between your school and the other school on this campus?	Thriving; we collaborate around things that aren't working; our organizational values are aligned; from the very beginning we engaged in methodical and careful relationship building	Living at a stable and mature level; very healthy; overall it's very good

Table One (continued)

How would you describe the goals or purpose of the partnership between the two schools that exist on this campus?	Provide choice to our families; leverage the strengths of each organization; improve post-secondary success for all students	School choice; how do we leverage innovation and change from both sides; how do we leverage the benefits of being in a traditional district school to make our school better; two parties with the same goals trying to collaborate or learn from each other; be more strategic and efficient with publicly funded facilities
How would you describe the relationship between the two schools in this partnership?		Very stable; very friendly feel; positive and mature;
What benefits, if any, do you believe your school reaps as a result of its membership in the collaborative partnership?	Thought partnership; we can learn from our partners more regularly; access to charter ideas and systems; the direct academic, social, and emotional benefits to our kids has been great	Access to facilities; shared services (transportation, nursing, food); band, football, electives; advocacy partner; new educational approaches especially around technology; a new grant for student iPads and home Wi-Fi

Table One (continued)

What does your school contribute to the collaborative partnership?	They benefit from an organizational structure that is fully built out; we bring expertise around Special Ed and English Language Learners	Test results; our academic gains and scores are accredited to the district; our math and science scores improve the school's overall standing; our teacher evaluation system
What benefits, if any, does the other school in the partnership reap as a result of your school's participation?	Innovation strategies and systems around data analysis	Keep the school out of improvement required; college prep culture
What sacrifices does your school make in order to participate in this partnership?	Principals can't simply make a decision without checking with their partner from the other school; we lose decision making power for our kids that are served through their program	It's not our traditional model so we have to adjust; there is a risk of losing kids as they transition from middle to high school; this isn't our building we are guests here; communication can be complicated; in the long run we wonder about the economic benefit; principal job is multifaceted in a way that it isn't in other schools; money exchange system can be a rub point; we get a flat per student rate from the district regardless of any special programming the student receives

Table One (continued)

How would you describe the give and take between your school and the other school in the partnership? Is the exchange fair or lopsided?	We have reached a beautiful equilibrium; there are a lot of win-win situations in the partnership; we started this partnership from the strengths in our respective organizations	Very fair; we feel like the facilities and general operations we get are strong and a fair exchange for what we provide;
How would you describe the level of trust that exists between your school and the other school in the partnership?	Very trusting relationship; we are both in it for the right reasons	We both have kids best interest in mind; the leadership and board on both sides has been very supportive; there is strong trust and we are in this for the long haul
How would you describe the impact the partnership has on risk taking and innovation in your school? Can you give some examples?	It has helped facilitate innovation; both organizations have a concrete foundation of problem solvers willing to do whatever it takes for kids; the assessment system we are going system wide with this year was originally learned from the charter middle school in this partnership	High, especially the iPad program

Table One (continued)

How do you define success for your school?	Post-secondary readiness; academic growth; student success to and through college; school connectedness	Student enrollment numbers and growth; ensure our students are college ready and go onto graduate; we set goals on achievement, overall school climate, and talent
How has membership in this partnership impacted success for your school?	We discuss and collaborate on what we are using as measures of success and share ideas; we help each other shape the best predictors of long term success in our students;	This has allowed us to go into areas of town where we were not previously established; helped us get a bigger footprint; It has allowed us to attract students we wouldn't normally get; operations is handled by the district leaders, which allows our leaders to focus on what matters most; the facilities and technology are tools that help us reach our goals
Have you made changes to your professional practice as a result of participation in this partnership? Please be specific.	I don't have a great answer for that one; I'm not quite sure	The only thing is pre-tactical, we adjust our calendar so it better aligns with our partner

Table 2: School Leader Response Summaries

<b>Question</b>	<b>Summary of Responses</b>	
	<b>District</b>	<b>Charter</b>
Describe your current role at your campus.	Principal; assistant principal	Principal; director of academics
How long have you been in the current role?	Two years; six years, the entirety of the partnership	Four and a half years; one year
How would you describe your roles and responsibilities in your current role on your campus?	I'm responsible for core instruction and the whole day; coaching and developing teachers; work with the curriculum; work with counselors to ensure students are OK; disciplinarian; Leading the instructional program; building operations and student culture; make sure kids are safe and learning; leading the coordination that takes place with the other principal in this partnership	Make sure the student achievement and culture is strong for the students we serve; oversee curriculum, teacher evaluation and instruction; I oversee SPED and ELL students

Table Two (Continued)

<p>How would you describe the current partnership that exists between your school and the other school on this campus?</p>	<p>We collaborate a lot and that is of our own initiative...not because the district office says we have to; we both chose to come here and be a part of this partnership; we both have different strengths and gaps but we actively choose to work together; district participation seems to be declining; we don't have district liaisons coming to visit anymore, I think it's because they know we work so cohesively here at the campus</p>	<p>Engaging in the partnership and working with the principal from District Middle School is the best part of my job; its changed overtime as we benefit from learning from one another; Ms. Retz and I are really close, our respective APs are really close, and that is where most of the collaboration happens at this time; we are one school with two programs in side of it; the partnership is very collaborative...we meet bi-weekly to weekly where we talk about praises, growth areas and calendar things; very warm</p>
<p>How would you describe the goals or purpose of the partnership between the two schools that exist on this campus?</p>	<p>We were losing enrollment so the purpose was to boost student enrollment; It gave our families school choice options; student achievement</p>	<p>We have built an identity around this partnership and promote it as something special; we have to invest the staff and students in this partnership; make sure the overall health of the campus is in a good place; creating great academic outcomes for our students and growing them into global citizens; provide choice for our families...I wish families had two more choices in this building; at the end of the day it is student learning; school choice and increasing options for kids is a major goal; increased collaboration</p>

Table Two (Continued)

<p>How would you describe the relationship between the two schools in this partnership?</p>	<p>It's very collaborative; when we first started we decided to have a weekly check-in to coordinate logistics and strategic planning; from weekly check-ins we have grown to include other members of our team as needed; we operate as one; over the years we have become a more cohesive unit; we work hand in hand all the time; when anyone asks me a question about our school I just answer it because I think of us as one school</p>	<p>I really learn a lot from Ms. Retz and love working with her; we are united around common spaces, calendaring, those sort of things; we still maintain our uniqueness...that is important because it offers our families choice about the education they prefer; very friendly and collaborative on the administrative level; teachers are friendly but not as collaborative</p>
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Table Two (Continued)

<p>What benefits, if any, do you believe your school reaps as a result of its membership in the collaborative partnership?</p>	<p>It allows us to have a fully enrolled school building; what we are able to do for 1,000 kids in terms of programming is much more than we could do with the 500 without this partnership; it allows us to have double the number of elective options; the student body bump is a huge one! It really allows us to do things we couldn't otherwise do; it gives our kids choice and the ability to see something different</p>	<p>We get to access the great resources here in District that we normally wouldn't have; we are pushing the limits and blurring the lines between district and charter; we are forcing our charter network to think differently about teaching and learning, especially in the area of technology; our kids have access to a full co-curricular program including athletics, band, electives, etc.; we wouldn't have access to the technology program we leverage here if it were not for the partnership; this is a beautiful building that our teachers and students get to access with fully built out technology and infrastructure; we get access to all of the district wide resources; participation in electives for our kids; amenities like secure and strong internet and fully built out infrastructure</p>
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Table Two (Continued)

<p>What does your school contribute to the collaborative partnership?</p>	<p>We got a grant to go one-to-one with iPads, additionally it included a data plan for the students if it were not for the partnership Charter Middle School would not have been about to receive or participate in this opportunity; the kids attending Charter Middle School get to stay with the friends and in the neighborhood but also get to experience something different; sharing of ideas and practices</p>	<p>Financially its great because I have flexibilities in my budget that allow me to easily pay for some things while Ms. Retz can easily pay for buses or other stuff; we are still 10-15 percentage points above District Middle School in every tested subject, so that is a tremendous boost to the test scores; we are here to boost enrollment and boost achievement;</p>
<p>What benefits, if any, does the other school in the partnership reap as a result of your school's participation?</p>	<p>Because of their model and size, Charter Middle school would not be able to offer much of what they have here like electives and athletics; families get to exercise school choice and have access to extracurriculars they normally would not have; they benefit a lot from being part of a fully built out school system that is much larger than their charter network; they benefit from food services and transportation services; they get to see a different way of doing things; they participate in our extracurricular functions</p>	<p>This partnership has allowed District Middle School to have a full building, keep families in the neighborhood, and stay out of IR; since we have been here data has improved; we are currently the middle school in the district showing the most academic growth; they have been able to watch and learn from the way we coach teachers in our system</p>

Table Two (Continued)

What sacrifices does your school make in order to participate in this partnership?	There is another partner in the work you have to consider; you can't really just make decisions without consulting with them first; sometimes a room or having enough space can be an issue	When you make a decision there are additional people to talk to and hoops to jump through; exam and lunch scheduling can be a pain; calendaring is always a challenge with two schools in the same building; working for two different schools is challenging and duplicates many logistical items in the day to day
How would you describe the give and take between your school and the other school in the partnership? Is the exchange fair or lopsided?	Very fair; honestly Mr. Snow and I have a great working relationship; so fair Charter Middle School afforded District middle School the ability to stay open; their enrollment boost save us!	Not sure if it is 50/50 but it seems fair; I am constantly grateful for the opportunities we are afforded here; I'm not sure fair is the best way to describe it...sometimes there is a lack of understanding from members of our team or their team; overall we both benefit a ton from this partnership; the distribution of funding at the district/network level seems odd
How would you describe the level of trust that exists between your school and the other school in the partnership?	Strong; we redesigned our master schedule together; Mr. Snow said here are my top priorities I want to tackle and I said the same. Then we worked together and created a master schedule that supports those things; there is no mistrust; we have gotten to be like a little family	It is really strong; we never make excuses about the other side; we very deliberately rooted out any divisive talk about the other school; it continues to increase; it is probably higher among administrators than among teachers

Table Two (Continued)

How would you describe the impact the partnership has on risk taking and innovation in your school? Can you give some examples?	Tremendous; it allows us to try things...the iPad grant is a prime example; it has made both schools bigger risk takers; we were invited to go to their charter school conferences and learned so much about different ways of teaching and learning	The iPad grant is a big deal for us!; it has really changed or challenged the model for an academic program in our charter network
How do you define success for your school?	STAAR success is important; quality academic programming for our students	Making sure we have great daily instruction in every classroom; state accountability is important
How has membership in this partnership impacted success for your school?	Having a working partner in this work has been great; we collaborate together to tackle our goals, which ultimately is post-secondary readiness for our kids	I think so, our non-LEP students are outperforming others around the district;
Have you made changes to your professional practice as a result of participation in this partnership? Please be specific.	This partnership has made me realize different ways of doing things that still come to the same end; I've learned different ways of treating people and engaging in the work with enthusiasm and joy; it rejuvenated the way I looked at education	Many, so many; it has opened my mind to new ways of doing things...especially with technology integration; I've gained a ton of humility and appreciation for the people that work here; it changed my perception of what really happens in district schools; yes, my beliefs about traditional public schools and partnerships in general have shifted; I've broadened my perspective about how to best serve kids

Table 3: Teacher Response Summaries

Question	Summary of Responses	
	District	Charter
Describe your current role at your campus.	I teach 7 <sup>th</sup> grade social studies/humanities	6 <sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts
How long have you been in the current role?	Three years	Three years
How would you describe your roles and responsibilities in your current role on your campus?	I teach the entire grade level in humanities;	I am responsible for creating the curriculum for reading, writing, and social studies; I lead the 6 <sup>th</sup> grade team
How would you describe the current partnership that exists between your school and the other school on this campus?	This year I've had the least amount of interaction with the folks from Charter Public School; this year I feel like we are just doing our own thing while in previous years it felt like we collaborated more	It has grown but it still feels like we are two different schools; the leadership across the two schools meet a lot; there is not a lot of overlap or collaboration amongst the teachers...there just is not enough time
How would you describe the goals or purpose of the partnership between the two schools that exist on this campus?	The partnership offers students choice; the partnership brings a spotlight and lots of attention to our school;	We are here to keep District Public School from closing, either because of low enrollment or poor performance; ultimate goal is that all the students from this neighborhood are successful; to give parents choice about where to send their child to school
How would you describe the relationship between the two schools in this partnership?	Its mostly positive; leadership work together closely on certain projects	Very friendly; their does seem to be a sense of competition

Table Three (continued)

What benefits, if any, do you believe your school reaps as a result of its membership in the collaborative partnership?	The partnership gives us access to resources I don't think we would normally have; we got a grant to go one-to-one with iPads and a data plan for kids...I don't think that happens without the partnership; they strengthen our athletic teams and fine arts	The facility here is better than any other school has in our charter network; our students get the benefit of electives and athletics; we just received a grant for iPads for all our students, which wouldn't have happened without the partnership
What does your school contribute to the collaborative partnership?	We contribute athletics and fine art offerings; the wider benefits of a fully built out school district; we contribute a well built and functioning facility	It is healthy for all the kids that attend the school to be on the same campus and learn from each other
What benefits, if any, does the other school in the partnership reap as a result of your school's participation?	Their kids get to experience a full middle school program they normally wouldn't in their charter school	They benefit from our successful academic program
What sacrifices does your school make in order to participate in this partnership?	Our faculty is a bit limited since we only have half the students in the building	We are perceived negatively by the other charter schools in our network, they think we don't do things the "charter school way"
How would you describe the give and take between your school and the other school in the partnership? Is the exchange fair or lopsided?	The partnership brings benefits to our school but I think Charter Public School benefits more than we do	The decision making on this campus often ultimately lies with District Public School, because this is their school they have more power in the partnership
How would you describe the level of trust that exists between your school and the other school?	It is pretty mellow between the two faculties	I do not have any sense there is distrust

Table Three (continued)

How would you describe the impact the partnership has on risk taking and innovation in your school? Can you give some examples?	Well, the partnership led to us getting off IR. Since we are no longer IR we have a lot more freedom to innovate and try new things in our teaching	The partnership has been our excuse to our charter network about why we will take risks and innovate. The one-to-one iPad initiative is a prime example, that does not happen in any of our other schools; the technology stuff we do here is a big risk for our school
How do you define success for your school?	Providing a safe and welcoming space for students to come and get the best education we can possibly offer	In the eyes of Texas it is are we passing STAAR? I want our students to be empathetic, have access to technology; I want them to be global citizens
How has membership in this partnership impacted success for your school?	Well, the partnership led to us getting off IR. Since we are no longer IR we have a lot more freedom to innovate and try new things in our teaching	What I appreciate most about this partnership are the risks it has afforded us to take and what I have learned from sharing a building with another school
Have you made changes to your professional practice as a result of participation in this partnership? Please be specific.	Yes, especially during my first year. I was really able to collaborate with my counterpart from the other school and share the resources she was using	I've taken more risks; I now do flexible seating in my classroom, which I never would have done before; we have rearranged our day to give kids more time with literacy; the partnership has shifted my mindset about the work

Table 4 below demonstrates the frequency with which the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust appeared, and thus seem to be occurring in the partnership, within each of the ten functions.

Table 4: Frequency table of collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust within each of the ten functions.

	Exchange	Negotiation	Role Differentiation	Trust	Totals
Governance Operations	3	1	1	2	7
Curriculum and Instruction	30	11	18	20	79
Campus Operations	12	11	14	11	48
Instructional Support Services	18	16	6	12	52
Human Resources	10	7	9	8	34
Admin, Finance, and Business Operations	6	7	6	1	20
Facilities and Plant Services	9	12	8	7	36
Accountability, Information, and Tech	31	15	25	19	90
External and Internal Communications	2	5	4	4	15
Operations and Support	12	5	10	6	33
Totals	133	90	101	90	



I was hesitant to include a frequency table here; however, I felt it was a data set that should be shared with the reader about this case study. Creswell (2013) reminds us that frequency tables could convey a quantitative orientation that is contrary to qualitative research. Additionally, it can convey the impression that all codes are given equal emphasis, which is not necessarily true. Despite Creswell's warning, I included this table in order to give the reader a sense of the extent of collaboration that can also serve as a starting point for the findings that follow.

#### **EVIDENCE OF COLLABORATION WITHIN EACH OF THE TEN FUNCTIONS**

Data for this portion of the findings comes from semi-structured interviews, memoing and reflective journaling, and two documents from Sample District/Charter Collaborative. The first of the aforementioned documents is a guiding document of the Collaborative given the pseudonym, "Document 1." Document 1 breaks down why and how the partnership was conceived, the purpose and goals of the partnership, the details of the parties involved, the structures and systems used to form the partnership and its guiding principles, and a description of the individual stakeholders' formational work as the partnership was brought to fruition. The second document is the Sample District/Charter Collaborative contract, which is the legally enforceable agreement between the two school systems involved in Sample District/Charter Collaborative. The contract details the responsibilities and commitments of each party and what each party receives in exchange for carrying out said responsibilities and commitments.

#### **Purpose of Sample District/Charter Collaborative.**

Before we explore collaboration within the ten functions in Sample District/Charter Collaborative it is important to understand the purpose and impetus of this partnership.

This will allow us to better make sense of the collaboration that occurs and does not occur in the collaborative itself. The purpose of Sample District/Charter Collaborative is clearly stated in Document 1 and reads, “to develop a partnership for the benefit of all students in the district, especially those who may not be currently performing to their potential, to eliminate dropouts, and to shift the district culture to ‘success for all.’” It is important to note Document 1 goes on to mention leveraging the strengths of the organizations involved as a driver for the partnership. Specifically, it states,

By leveraging the instructional technology, and extra-curricular and co-curricular tools of Sample District, with the college preparatory program, and leadership and teacher development tools of Sample Charter, this new programming provides access for 10% of Sample District students to access high- quality, college-preparatory charter options as part of the Sample District portfolio.

Mr. Yen echoes this sentiment by arguing the partnership started with the strengths of each organization and those strengths were leveraged for the greater good of the partnership:

Secondly, was to leverage the strengths of each organization to improve Sample District and Sample Charter. Specifically, Sample Charter had done some great work around first-year teacher development, and so we wanted to learn from them and take some of their strategies and integrate them into our district. I can get you the specific language of the goals but in a nutshell, it was taking the existing strengths of each organization and leveraging them to improve.

This idea of starting with each organization’s strength was critical to fostering future collaboration. It gave participants the feeling they each have something of value to bring to the table and that neither are inferior to the other entity in the partnership.

## **Function I: Governance operations.**

This function ensures the effective and appropriate fulfillment of the duties and responsibilities of the school board and the superintendent and his/her leadership team. Collaboration in regards to governance centered mostly on board approval and support needed to pursue, secure, and maintain the partnership. Additionally, collaboration in Sample District/Charter Collaborative began as an idea amongst system level leaders. Document 1 states this partnership began as a conversation four years ago amongst the system level leaders of the schools involved.

### ***Trust.***

Governance and system level leadership is critical to building trust in a partnership. Specifically, they must set the tone and expectation for how the partnership is going to function and be deliberate about building trust and relationships. Mr. Jefferson, an organizational level leader for Sample Charter, explains this phenomenon as mindset shifting and serves to establish the importance and need for trust for those engaged in the partnership:

The fact that a superintendent or their deputies can sit around a table, once every six weeks, talk about literally two schools in their portfolio, is game-changing. The fact that District Superintendent will come or Charter Superintendent will come and they're literally talking. These are two schools, in a giant system and they're literally talking about the success of two schools.

Ms. Olden, a leader at District Middle, echoed Mr. Jefferson's ideas about organizational level leadership setting the tone for the partnership and being an integral part of shifting people's mindsets about the work by establishing trust:

Then, again, our superintendent went and reached out and we ended up with the partnership. I really think the partnership was an excellent idea because it showed that what you thought for so long that charters and publics (district schools) could never be together in the same room or they would explode.

### ***Exchange.***

A governance level collaboration in regards to exchange that surfaced from this case is local, state, and national advocacy. When Sample District and Sample Charter united they became a greater force to be reckoned with on the political stage than they would be apart or, even worse, competing with each other. The partnership allows them the unique opportunity to share resources, ideas, and collaborate on strategy for lobbying politically for school reform. Mr. Jefferson argues:

I also think it has enabled districts and charters to get together to advocate collectively at the state level on policy and other things. To the traditional politician, it often will blow their mind that district superintendents and charter superintendents are coming together to advocate together, that they just don't understand that.

While the data showed only seven total hits for the governance function, establishing trust and fair exchange for organizational level leaders and their school boards is critical to the formation and longevity of partnerships.

### **Function II: Curriculum and instruction.**

This function deals with the fulfillment of the academic program. Specifically, it ensures an aligned and appropriate curriculum is adopted, communicated, and supported

throughout the school system. The function of curriculum and instruction is very present in the ideals and guiding documents of the partnership. Document 1 states:

Having the collective responsibility of student achievement our collaboration will:

1. Erase the school achievement gap between students from high poverty communities and those who do not represent high poverty communities by rapidly accelerating student achievement in the charter programs and improving the effectiveness of the traditional school instructional program:

However, this case study showed this function has not found its way into explicit practice. That isn't to say it was not evident. While I did not find any deliberate sharing or collaborating of curriculum and instruction in the core content areas, Sample District/Charter Collaborative did have a profound impact on curriculum and instruction for many of the actors in this study. Improved academic outcomes are an explicit goal of the partnership and the case showed many of the participants changed their mindset and even educational practices as a result of participation in the partnership.

### ***Exchange.***

Several of the participants in this study articulated a shifting in the mindset, thinking, and practice as a result of the partnership. Ms. Olden, an assistant principal for District Middle, shared:

It made me realize different ways that I could do things that would still come to the same end. Different ways of treating people, different ways of-- What I saw when I would go to a charter professional development was excitement. I would see people that I thought, "Man, these people really want to be here. They want to teach. They are uplifting. They are on fire! It rejuvenated the way I looked at education.

Ms. Olden went on to say that immediately following the experience at Sample Charter PD Sample District School began to change the way the engaged teachers in professional development:

We changed and ran a lot of our things in the same way. We had Sample Charter people. We had all sorts of opportunities, which were excellent for us both on both ends to learn different ways that education can work. It really did change my mindset on how you can get your staff, teachers to become more invested in what they're doing.

Ms. Apple, a teacher for Charter Middle, shared similar changes in mindset and practice based on participation in the collaborative. Specifically, she shared how the experience opened her mind to new ways of teaching and organizing her day:

What I appreciate about being here is because of the different risks that we've taken and just the different opportunities to learn about the direction education is moving even in the course of the country and with personalization and technology and those things. I don't know that if I hadn't been here, if I would have learned that somewhere in any other traditional school setting that I would be in.

Additionally, she shared things she learned about restructuring portions of the instructional block as a result of participation in the partnership:

The humanities block is three class periods now. We've never done that. We've had double block through ELA or for math. We've been able to readjust and redo even our schedule and our content, whereas those things wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Ms. Apple gives tangible results linked to the curriculum and instruction function she reaped as a result of participation in the partnership.

### ***Trust and innovation.***

Participants, especially those at the campus level from Sample Charter shared examples of changing their curriculum and instruction model based on the fact they were in the partnership. The partnership gave them the freedom to diverge from the standard instructional models in their charter network and be innovative in ways other schools in their network could not. Ms. Apple shared the following risks and changes she has been able to make in her classroom:

The fact that I now do flexible seating in here would have never done otherwise...ever. That was a really big risk for me as someone who thrives on structure...I definitely have taken a lot more risks. Here we are like, 'Let's do something new to give kids more time with literacy. Let's create a three-hour block, let's integrate across curriculum.' Those are things that I don't know that I would have done before being here.

One unorthodox innovation for Sample Charter, was a grant Sample District/Charter Collaborative received to go one-to-one with iPads including a home data package. The grant afforded every student and faculty member in the partnership an iPad and a five gig wireless data plan so they could use the iPad to do school work away from school. Every participant who brought up the iPad grant expressed his or her belief it would not have come to fruition were it not for the high profile status of the collaborative. An important piece of data with a profound impact on curriculum and instruction.

When responding to a question about how the collaborative has impacted risk taking, Ms. Thatcher, a leader at Charter Middle, responded, "The iPad I think is the best example of that. All of our kids in the building have an iPad with a data plan, which has enabled us with lots of tools. I think that's a great example of it." Mr. Snow, principal of

Charter Middle, agreed the iPad grant was a direct result of being in the collaborative and an exciting curricular innovation for the school:

The fact that we both got it is really important. Among Sample Charter Network schools, we are unique in that we are the only campus that has iPads that are cellular data enabled, that our kids can take home and continue to learn on when they are not here and our teachers get to leverage those tools in the classroom. We wouldn't have been able to do that if we weren't a part of Sample District.

Mr. Snow later said the iPad grant not only changed his campus but also impacted the thinking at the network level. He added, “The iPads are a big deal. We've had to have real conversations about how that changes our academic program at Sample Charter Network.” The quote from Mr. Snow leverages trust and innovation in one school to encourage a possible impact across an entire system of schools.

### ***Negotiation.***

The collaborative element of negotiation came into play around driving academic outcomes for the success of all students. The collaborative gave Mr. Yen, a leader with Sample District, easy access to resources and measurements for ensuring Sample District students met system wide goals. Mr. Yen shared:

I talked with Sample Charter Network about what measures they pay attention to that they think are the best predictors of long-term success. I talked with their Foundation about what they've learned nationally in all of their different regional contexts about what data points really matter the most. As we were building out our strategy to try to find the fewest best predictors of long-term success, Sample Charter really helped shape that in part. So that think tank has really helped us be sharper in the way that we strategize around post-secondary support and success.



To me, just an openness to thinking differently beyond just the six schools and programs has I think helped this work really flourish.

Additionally, Mr. Yen explained that Sample Charter Network simply has more experience with measuring certain aspects of student success. Mr. Yen explained:

A lot of times, charter management organizations that have been trying to move the needle on post-secondary success, simply for longer stretches of time have thought about some of the strategies that we're starting to think about a while ago.

Their experience was a resource that Mr. Yen was able to access easily and then leverage for success in his schools.

### ***Role differentiation.***

Lastly, role differentiation is spelled out in Document 1. In regards to curriculum and instruction, Document 1 states:

Sample District and Sample Charter will collaborate across campuses to share best practices and norm expectations for student performance. Accountability subsets include English Language Learners, students receiving Special Education services and students with high mobility rates.

It later states:

We have a collective obligation to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, work, and life. It is our collective responsibility to provide all children with a great public school choice.

This document does not go into great depth about how the two parties are to collaborate in terms of curriculum and instruction; however, it does set objectives and guiding principles that require a great deal of attention and success in this function. While there has not been much explicit collaboration about curriculum standards and instructional

techniques, this section has shown substantial evidence in regards to shifts in personal practice and greater access for all students enrolled in one of the partnership schools.

### **Function III: Campus operations.**

This function deals with the system wide coordination of the educational mission in the school system. Specifically, it involves the planning and monitoring of success for all students across all sub-populations and special programs at all campuses. While, independently, each of these school systems have dynamic structures in place for managing this function, it is not an area of extensive collaboration. However, there is some collaboration around this function, especially in the area of campus master scheduling.

#### ***Exchange.***

On the campus level the element of exchange manifested itself in this function through the sharing of human resources to drive outcomes. In the event a school leader is absent or busy it is common for the leaders to collaborate and share resources to fill gaps. Mr. Snow, a leader from Charter Middle, remarked in the event he or Ms. Retz, the principal from District Middle, are down a key employee they might say, “Hey, we need you to fill in the gaps over here. And I am like, Great, we'll shift one of our APs (Assistant Principal) in that direction to help support.” This type of collegiality and sharing of personnel seemed common for the two campus leaders.

#### ***Negotiation.***

The greatest area of collaboration in this function took place through negotiation around the campus master schedule. Since two schools were sharing the same campus it was imperative that they coordinated the creation and execution of a daily master schedule. Lunch times, arrivals, dismissals, electives, athletics, and common spaces all had to be

arranged and supported by a master schedule that served both entities in the partnership. Ms. Retz explained in order for the partnership to function properly the two schools master schedules, “have to align.”

The two campus leaders took a systematic approach to collaborating and negotiating around the master schedule during weekly meetings. Ms. Retz shared:

Through a weekly check-in, we were able to build our relationship, and then kind of figure out how-- what needed to go beyond the conversation between him and me. And so that's where we would bring our teams together as we were planning for different projects or events or working on the master schedule.

Ms. Retz explained the building of a common master schedule was a yearlong process which required in depth negotiation and collaborative work:

When we redesigned our master schedule, we had a lot of different things that we were working on and so did he. And so we started in October-November, kind of laying out, ‘Here are our priorities and the big things that we want to be able to do with our master schedule.’ He was able to say, ‘Here are the big things that I'm trying to do.’ His team and my team started in October-November, and I collaborated until March, and totally redesigned our whole entire master schedule incorporating two different campuses of two different sets of need.

While this process was intensive and time consuming, the two leaders, given the time devoted, clearly felt it critical to foster a successful and mutually beneficial coexistence.

The successful work of the two leaders was key in bringing a common master schedule into existence; Ms. Retz realized the value of sharing the space with Sample Charter and explained how her school has become dependent on the partnership:

We are able to have a fully enrolled school building. I see that as a huge, huge benefit because if we didn't have that student body's bump, we just wouldn't be able

to have all the offerings that we have that we benefit from. So that's a big one. And I think that's honestly the biggest one.

### ***Role Differentiation.***

Document 1 articulates the rules of engagement in regards to this function for the two school systems. Specifically Document 1 explains:

Sample District and Sample Charter will collaborate across campuses to share best practices and norm expectations for student performance. Accountability subsets include English Language Learners, students receiving Special Education services and students with high mobility rates.

Additionally, Document 1 states some common goals around this function, including:

The Sample District/Charter Collaborative will focus on improving: 1. The academic performance of students; particularly Sample District students from high poverty communities. 2. Leadership development of all campus and instructional leaders. 3. The continuum of support for students after graduation to support the transition to and through college.

Document 1 goes on to challenge the two organizations to collaborate around the following vision related to this function:

Together we will: erase the school achievement gap between students from high poverty communities and those who do not represent high poverty communities by rapidly accelerating student achievement in the charter programs and improving the effectiveness of the traditional school instructional program:

We have a collective obligation to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college, work, and life.

These excerpts, found in Document 1, provide clear guidance for the collaboration, clarity in terms of the expectation of unity towards a common vision, and a guiding north star for the work of the schools involved in the collaborative.

***Trust.***

The data revealed few opportunities or evidence of trust in the function of campus operations. Document 1 had a statement about a common admissions system in place between the two schools, which requires trust. Specifically, it states, “Sample Charter will develop a common admissions system that aligns with the Sample District charter opportunities to ensure Sample District students attend their school of choice.”

Additionally, Mr. Yen, an organizational level leader at Sample District, shared both organizations willingness to think differently and receptively. He described a think tank that has been created between the two networks in the partnership and some other surrounding districts. Yen shared:

So that think tank has really helped us be sharper in the way that we strategize around post-secondary support and success. To me, just an openness to thinking differently beyond just the six schools and programs has I think helped this work really flourish.

Before the partnership was formed the idea of branching out to other districts to co-advocate or share ideas was not a common practice for either school system in the partnership.

**Function IV: Instructional support services.**

This function manages the many additional services needed in a school system to support the instructional program. These services might include: socio-emotional

counseling, library services, health services, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, transportation services, food services, and community outreach services. Instructional support services, along with facilities and maintenance, is one of the most valuable and important functions for Sample Charter. Furthermore, collaboration manifested itself in a variety of ways across all elements of social exchange theory used in this study.

### ***Exchange.***

Sample Charter employees seemed very satisfied with the collaborative exchange in this partnership around instructional support services. In return for their membership and commitment, their students are able to enjoy a plethora of resources they normally would not have access to. In order to make this possible, Charter Middle School's participation in the collaborative is equally as critical. Without them, District Middle School would not have the students it needs to sustain substantial support services. Ms. Retz, District Middle School principal explained the phenomena as follows:

Our enrollment was way down, to the point where the school even had to close for a time. Now it's between 900 and a thousand. So what we're able to do in terms of programming for students with a thousand kids is far different than what we would be able to do with 600. So that's almost double the number of elective options for kids.

Ms. Retz also touched on the benefit for Charter Middle school by explaining what their students receive at Sample District/Charter Collaborative as compared to a normal Charter school in their network:

They are not normally able to offer all of those electives and athletics and all that stuff because of their size and their models. I mean, they are able to continue the college bound brand and their academic programming, but kids are able to access-

- kids and families can access that choice while also still benefiting from things they would typically have to forego.

Mr. Snow, Charter Middle School principal echoed many of Ms. Retz' sentiments. Specifically, he was excited that the collaborative provided his students the opportunity to, "have access to a co-curricular program that involves band and music and art and athletics, all of these things that they otherwise wouldn't have!"

Ms. Thatcher, another leader at Charter Middle School, further elaborated on their satisfaction with the exchange by speaking to the quality of the personnel and programming available. She shared, "the sports programs are wonderful. The choir teacher isn't a person who's teaching English most of the day and has one-off choir. This is an actual choir director. Kids at our other Charter schools don't have that!" The collaborative exchange in this function proved profitable for both school systems involved in the collaborative.

### ***Negotiation.***

The give and take in the collaborative around instructional support services is very one-sided. However, while Charter Middle School receives the bulk of the advantage in this function, District Middle School receives the clear advantage in other areas. Specifically, Mr. Yen, an organizational level leader at Sample District, shared Sample Charter Network has told him, "they've really benefited from an organizational structure fully built out." Since Sample Charter Network is significantly smaller and receives less funding than sample District Network, they benefit greatly from the full range of instructional support services.

Mr. Snow confirms the sentiments shared by Mr. Yen. He spoke about the full range of services available to his students that normally would not be part of their educational program. Mr. Snow stated:

They also provide tangibly, the shared services, so they provide transportation, they provide food, they provide nursing services, all those things are tangible benefits. I think the other piece on the programming aspect, is it has enabled us to leverage the benefits of a comprehensive school in a larger district that we don't traditionally offer. Our kids are able to play football, they are able to get into the band, and they are able to take some electives that we wouldn't traditionally offer at our existing Charter Schools. I think those are all tangible benefits of being in a partnership.

Ms. Apple, a teacher at Charter Middle School agreed, "Students here get the benefit of the electives and sports. Other charter campuses don't have that." Ms. Thatcher expressed her excitement about the library services available to their students here, "There is an actual library downstairs with a full-time librarian. There's no full-time librarians at other Charter Middle Schools." Ms. Thatcher identified other district level services that are an added benefit, "Sample District has this special Center, where they have all those-- I don't want to say vocational-tech, but they even have anime and-- I don't know, all kinds of cool programs that our kids have access to."

Ms. Dawn, a teacher at District Middle School argued they also reap benefits from the shared instructional services. She stated, "we share athletic teams so the students play on the same athletic teams...it also strengthens our athletic teams and fine arts programs." An additional advantage for Sample District is the choice it offers to their families. Mr. Snow shared the sentiments of many of the local families when he said, "My kid's are going to go to a school with a strong electives program and they're going to get college prep through the academics. I definitely want to opt into that!" The collaborative offers families not only the opportunity to experience a college prep charter education, but also the exposure to the choices afforded by a comprehensive school program.



***Role differentiation.***

Both Document 1 and the collaborative contract have explicit language about role differentiation as it relates to the function of instructional support services. Document 1 simply states, “Sample District will provide access for Charter Middle School students to the district’s wide array of extracurricular and co-curricular classes and athletic programs.” Additionally, the language in the contract is far more specific and incredibly inclusive of Charter Middle School students in virtually all instructional support services that Sample District students and employees receive.

Specifically, the Sample District/Charter Collaborative contract states the following in regards to safety: “Police services. The Parties agree that the Sample District Police Department will provide certain services to Charter Middle School and that the Parties will collaborate on the type and extent of such services.”

Health services are included in the contract and state, “Students enrolled in Charter Middle School will have access to any health screenings made available to students who attend District Middle School to the same extent and in the same manner as any Sample District student attending District Middle School.” Additionally, Charter Middle School students receive nurse services from Sample District as follows:

Students enrolled in Charter Middle will have access to any Sample District school nurse(s) assigned to Sample District/Charter Collaborative during the District Middle school day and in accord with the Sample District calendar to the same extent and in the same manner as any Sample District student who attends District Middle. During the summer session, students enrolled in Charter Middle will have access to any Sample District school nurse(s) assigned to a Sample District campus during the regular Sample District school day and in accord with the Sample District calendar to the same extent and in the same manner as any Sample District

student who attends another Sample District school during summer school. The Parties agree that any Sample District nurse(s) assigned to District Middle (or to provide services to Sample District students during summer session) will work the hours and days assigned by Sample District even though such hours and days may not coordinate with the schedule of Charter Middle.

Library Services are also spelled out in the contract. The Sample District/Charter Collaborative contract reads:

Sample District will make its library facilities and media resources, including all databases, available to Charter Middle School students during the times that Charter Middle School students attend classes in accordance with the Charter Middle School. The Parties will collaborate on staffing of the District Middle School library during dates and times that Charter Middle School is in session but District Middle School is closed in accordance with the Sample District calendar.

Food services are another instructional support service clearly spelled out in the contract. Specifically, it reads:

Child Nutrition Services; Free and Reduced Lunch. Sample District will provide child nutrition services, including all free and reduced-price breakfast, lunch, and snack programs and other available federally funded services for which Charter Middle School students qualify.

Counseling Services are another critical instructional support service for school systems that is specifically addressed in the contract as follows:

Sample District certified counselors assigned to District Middle School and all related counseling services available to Sample District students who attend District Middle School will be made available to Charter Middle School students during the

District Middle School regular school day to the same extent and in the same manner to students enrolled in District Middle School.

Document 1 explicitly provides for the collaboration of the two school systems around athletics and electives. This is a key point of collaboration for Charter Middle School as it is a service charter network students rarely receive. Document 1 states, “Sample District will provide access for Charter Middle School students to the district’s wide array of extracurricular and co-curricular classes and athletic programs.”

Lastly, Document 1 provides for the inclusion of all Charter Middle School students on study trips by stating:

Sample District agrees to provide transportation for study trips, non-Program activities, District Middle School electives, and extra-curricular activities for Charter Middle School students to the same extent and same manner as Sample District provides for District Middle School students. Additionally, Charter Middle School may elect to provide its own transportation for study or field trips related to the Charter Middle School Instructional Program.

The two guiding documents of Sample District/Charter Collaborative establish clear roles and a foundation of trust upon which the two entities can collaborate.

#### **Function V: Human resources.**

The Human Resources function manages all aspects of employee relations. Additionally, this function is responsible for coordinating across campuses and departments to ensure support with recruitment, hiring, retention, and personnel evaluation. In this case one could argue there was much collaborative crossover in this function involving around the sharing of key personnel. Those collaborative efforts were addressed

by the instructional support services function. Therefore, this section will focus more on collaboration data in the areas of personnel evaluation and retention.

***Exchange.***

From a human resource perspective, a major benefit Sample District reaps as a result of the partnership is personnel development. Mr. Yen, a Sample District organizational leader, explained human resource benefits were one of the reasons Sample District began the partnership in the first place:

The way we began this partnership was to leverage the strengths of each organization to improve Sample District and Sample Charter. Specifically, with Sample Charter, we learned that they had an excellent leadership development program. Really one of the goals was to learn from that and help to enhance our own leadership development focus. Sample Charter also had done some great workaround first-year teacher development that we wanted to learn from.

Ms. Vargas, a Sample Charter organizational leader, echoed Mr. Yen's thoughts about leveraging Sample Charter's personnel development strength:

The other benefit is that we have a very good approach to teacher evaluation and compensation. The district initiative of Sample District we have done and they wanted to learn from our example of teacher compensation by performance and evaluations not by tenure. This is something that Sample District has learned from at the district level rather than the campus level. They engage in conversations a lot about our teacher evaluation system.

### *Negotiation.*

With the partnership in its seventh year the sharing of resources, ideas, and systems on personnel and development has become more mutually beneficial. Mr. Yen shared an experience he had the previous week regarding the human resource function:

Just last week, Sample District and Sample Charter formed a leadership cohort for assistant principals because together we believed that was an area we could improve on, and so two times the manpower to build it at half the cost. We're training about 20-25 assistant principals with programming that we collectively designed together and that's just one example.

Mr. Yen's example gives concrete evidence of the power of a partnership in the human resource function that, as an added bonus, has positively impacted the finance function. He continued with another example:

I bumped into a Sample Charter leader yesterday in this building who is meeting with our leader over talent. He was asking her questions about an approach to talent and an approach to staffing that we've used for the last couple of years, because they're really interested in what we're trying and they wonder if it could actually enhance some of their experience and really address an area that they've identified as an area need because of principal feedback. It's really cool that we're not going to their offices asking them for advice; they're coming to our offices asking us for advice. It's nice to know that both of those things are true on any given day.

Mr. Yen provides evidence the exchange and negotiation in the partnership around this function is more balanced than when the partnership first began. While this is due in large part to the willingness of the leaders to work together, it is also due to strong role differentiation in the partnership's founding documents.

### ***Role Differentiation.***

Document 1 establishes a foundation for collaboration in the Human Resource function. In the guiding document it states, “Sample District and Sample Charter will work collaboratively to develop streamlined instructional support and evaluative tools for teachers and campus leaders.” It then goes on to link that work to partnership outcomes for students, “Sample District and Sample Charter will develop avenues for a common leadership development system to ensure current and future school leaders embody key behaviors and are developed to ensure students are college ready, and schools succeed.”

The document names specific areas for the partners to collaborate and specific obligations Sample Charter is expected to bring to the partnership for this function including:

Develop great teachers, school leaders, and schools: a. Sample District and Sample Charter will professionally develop teachers using the Sample Charter model which offers tailored support for the instructional needs of teachers, and provides alternative certification for teachers seeking state credentialing.

Document 1 provides clarity in terms of role differentiation for the two school systems involved in the partnership, which proves to be critical for the success of this collaborative. These expectations later manifest themselves in the sharing of human resource sub-functions described in the section on exchange and negotiation. Lastly, these same founding documents supported the development of a trusting relationship between the two school systems.

### ***Trust.***

The back and forth described in the exchange and negotiation portions of this section relies on a culture of trust between these two organizations. This trust was

intentionally built into the founding documents of the partnership. Document 1 makes it clear, “Sample District/Charter Collaborative will focus on improving: 1. The academic performance of students; particularly Sample District students from high poverty communities. 2. Leadership development of all campus and instructional leaders.” This expectation articulates the need for the two parties to trust each other to accomplish individual and group goals.

Document 1 secures the trust needed through transparent language on accountability. In regards to school and student success Document 1 clearly states,

Sample District and Sample Charter will ensure campuses are successful. If the school leader or campus fails to meet defined measures of student success, partners will take the necessary steps to ensure the future success of the school. These actions may include personnel reassignment or campus closure.

Ms. Retz, principal of District Middle School, confirms the commitment to success through her and Charter Middle School principal’s decision to join the work of the collaborative. She says, “Both of us knew the partnership was here and came in to be a part of that. So I think we both share an interest in working together and making the partnership really work.” The set of clearly defined roles, built on a foundation of trust, have proved successful avenues for navigating the human resource function in this case.

#### **Function VI: Administrative, finance, and business operations.**

This function includes the development, monitoring, leadership, management, and oversight of all district level finances. Once again, the guiding documents of this partnership proved vital to setting a clear expectation for collaboration.

***Exchange.***

At the onset of the partnership a fair and equitable exchange had to be reached in regard to finances. While Sample Charter students would be attending a Sample Charter school it would be in a Sample District facility and students would be academically accountable to Sample District. Therefore, in regards to finances the following agreement was reached and is memorialized in the contract:

Contract: Financial Consideration. In consideration of the services provided under this Contract, Sample District will pay Sample Charter as follows: (a) \$6,950.00 per student in Average Daily Attendance (“ADA”) annually for the 2012-13 school year; (b) \$6,750.00 per student in ADA annually for the 2013-14 school year; and (c) \$6,550.00 per student in ADA annually for the 2014-15 school year (the annual amount set forth in Section 16.01(a), 16.01(b), and 16.01(c) respectively shall be referred to herein as “Fee”).

Sample Charter agreed to receive a per unit allocation for each student, but surrenders any funding for special populations, such as English Language Learners, special education, etc.

At the campus level, collaboration around finances exists through an exchange of sharing financial burdens based on system-wide financial structures. Mr. Snow, principal of Charter Middle School, explains:

There are things that Ms. Retz can’t do that are easier for me to do, like budget, for example. I designed their staff t-shirts that are the same as our staffs' t-shirts with a different logo on the back and I buy those because it's really easy for me to spend that money and then she'll buy lunches or snacks. There's a really good symbiosis that happens in order for us to leverage the available resources on each side to support each other.



These types of exchanges and negotiations at the campus level seem small; however, they can be very useful and make life simpler for a building leader. Mr. Snow shares an additional example in the following section on negotiation.

### ***Negotiation.***

On the campus level, Ms. Retz and Mr. Snow use their systems financial parameters, constraints, and flexibilities to negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes. Ms. Snow shares one example:

I've got a school credit card; she doesn't have that. She's got to take money from titles fund or general funds. I just have my budget and I'm going to hit zero and I'm going to spend money the way I think we need to. We're much more quick and reactive in those cases, it benefits her. Then on the other side, it's much easier for her to just call transportation and order a bus or something. We don't have to pay for that bus, she'll pay for the bus. We just find those things that work well for either side and I think over time we pay each other back in respective ways.

Negotiation for finances seems to have a stronghold at the campus level amongst campus level leaders. The example above speaks to the commitment to collaboration needed by campus level leaders to best address these situations.

Document 1 set the groundwork for system level financial negotiation by establishing a working group to, “ensure budgeting, funding, and economies of scale are equitably distributed among all partners.” Since the end of the 2015, Mr. Jefferson, a Sample Charter organization level leader, negotiates the annual rate to be paid to Sample Charter by Sample District. He admitted that, “I coordinate the negotiation of the rates each year, with the corresponding CFO from Sample District that we work with.” This

serves as an example of financial negotiation at the district level that must occur in a successful collaborative partnership.

### ***Role differentiation.***

Once again the founding documents of the partnership create role clarity and responsibility for the key district function of school finance. Specifically, Document 1 established guidelines and deliverables for a finance working group at the onset of the partnership. The objectives of the working group were as follows: (1) Establish sustainable, flexible contract with equitable compensation for all partners; (2) Establish economies of scale that result in the cost per pupil at or below partner comparisons; and (3) Service other working groups as needed. Additionally, the document specified the stakeholders responsible for these objectives including: Sample District Chief Finance Officer, Sample Charter Chief Growth Officer, Sample Charter Chief Finance Officer, Sample Charter Growth and External Affairs Manager.

This level of attention to finance in the partnerships founding work establishes role differentiation over the critical function of school finance. Additionally, the transparency sets the stage for a collaborative relationship built on trust.

### ***Trust.***

The fiscally responsible model established in this partnership led to a firm level of trust and risk taking amongst stakeholders. Ms. Retz, principal of District Middle School, explained her experience competing with a local charter at a previous school she led:

In another district, I worked at public, traditional public middle school. We lost most of our-- I mean, really, about 40% of our enrolled students, and mostly our higher-performers to charters or other choice schools in the district. It was only

competitive, and there was no real collaboration or coordination between the schools that were taking our kids because it was -- it's funding for them. It's a zero-sum game. It's like either we get the fund when they enroll or they get it. So like that, we don't have that part. That's why it enables us to have a collaborative relationship because we're not fighting for enrollment and funding and scores, basically.

Ms. Retz describes a relationship at Sample District/Charter Collaborative built on trust. The partnership has positioned her to dedicate little or no resources to retaining students from neighboring charter schools. She explains that the collaborative works because it removes the necessity to battle for students and the funding they bring. Instead Ms. Retz, and her counterpart at Charter Middle School are able to pool their resources and work together towards common student goals.

#### **Function VII: Facilities and plant services.**

This function handles the planning, building, and upkeep of all district facilities. Additionally, it includes infrastructure updates, monitoring the need for new or fewer facilities, and ensuring the sustainability of designs. This function is an incredibly important one for Sample Charter. Charters do not get adequate state or federal funding for facilities and often are left with facilities far inferior to those of traditional schools within school districts. Sample District/Charter Collaborative provides a tremendous opportunity for Charter Middle School to share in the rich facility resources of District Middle School.

### ***Exchange.***

The facilities, infrastructure, and maintenance are huge benefits of the partnership for Sample Charter. Ms. Thatcher, a school leader from Charter Middle School, explains what some of those benefits look like at the school level:

This is a beautiful space. I mean this is the nicest Sample Charter School you will ever see. Even things like there's carpet-- I have an office that's actually an office and not a closet. It is a beautiful building, every classroom has a smart board, and every teacher has their own classroom-- At my other school, that wasn't the case.

Ms. Vargas, a district level leader for Sample Charter, echoes Ms. Thatcher's sentiments, "The facilities themselves (of District Middle School) and the innovative use of technology are tools that help us reach our goal." The facility resources that traditional public school educators often take for granted are valuable and cherished commodities for the employees from Sample Charter Network.

### ***Negotiation.***

Because of the worthwhile collaborative negotiation, Charter Middle School is able to benefit tremendously from the use of a high-functioning facility. Ms. Thatcher again brings up the iPad grant the partnership was able to secure; additionally, this time she shares another reason this would have never happened for Charter Middle School were it not for the collaborative:

We received the big grant, and one of the big reasons is that Sample District has the infrastructure and IT department to provide the security for us to have the iPads. Had we not been a partnership campus, I don't think we would have gotten the grant, even if our merit earned it, because we didn't have the infrastructure with IT, we wouldn't have gotten it.

The technological infrastructure inherent with a large and fully built out school district was a negotiated facility asset that, in this case, is providing Charter Middle School with a resource to drive student outcomes.

Ms. Vargas brings to light another example of how the negotiated collaborative benefits Charter Middle School, “The operation things are handled by Sample District which allows our school director to have more time as an instructional leader on campus.” The small benefit of outsourcing facilities and maintenance, in this partnership, has freed up the Charter Middle School campus leader to focus on what matters most, teaching and learning.

While the negotiation seems to favor Charter Middle School in this function District Middle School benefits as well. Ms. Olden, a school leader from District Middle, reminds us that if it were not for the partnership the school may not even be open as she states, “Again, we got to keep this building open because this building did close in 1986, I believe, because of low enrollment.”

### ***Role differentiation.***

The guiding documents, once again, provide a fine example of how to create role clarity in a district/charter collaborative such as the one from this case. Sample District/Charter Collaborative’s Document 1 and contract specifies a variety of facility and plant management sub-functions. This excerpt from the collaborative’s contract spells out the agreement on furniture:

Sample District will supply chairs, desks, bookcases, bookshelves, file cabinets, computer tables, conference tables, and other furniture as reasonably required for the Charter Middle School. Such furniture and equipment will be substantially the

same as furniture and equipment provided in other classrooms for the same grade level and/or same subject at District Middle School.

This excerpt speaks to janitorial responsibilities:

Sample District shall provide janitorial services to the area used by Charter Middle School in the same manner and at the same level as for the remainder of the District Middle School Premises.

This excerpt details expectations around technology infrastructure:

The Parties agree to work collaboratively so that Charter Middle School employees will have the proper software necessary for them to perform services under this Contract on their Charter Middle School computers in order for the educational technology to function. d) Network Connections. Sample District will make available at Charter Middle School all network connections, including wireless connections, with runs terminating to a local IDF, required in order to satisfy the operating needs and reporting requirements under this Contract. Sample District will also allow Charter Middle School hardware to access the Sample District Internet service including wireless accounts to the extent necessary to meet the operational needs of Charter Middle School. The Parties will work together to resolve any authentication, login, and/or trusted domain challenges that may arise.

This section provides clarity on the technology:

Sample District agrees to provide in Charter Middle School classroom the same or substantially similar educational technology as provided in a classroom of a similar subject for a similar grade level in Sample District for each school year during the Term of the Contact.

Additional aspects of facilities that could have been placed in this section are in the following section on trust.

### ***Trust.***

While some of the following items provide great examples of role differentiation in the collaborative, they also provide the trust necessary for both actors in the collaborative to function with assurance their facility and maintenance needs will be met. Document 1 provides the foundational language to establish such a line of trust by stating that the “Sample District will provide access for Sample Charter to utilize space in underutilized campuses, will maintain responsibility for capital improvement expenses, and will allow Sample Charter to adapt the space to best-fit educational needs.”

Ms. Thatcher articulates the benefits and manifestation of this trust on the campus level when she expresses her delight with the reliability and functionality of services as she states,

The Internet is incredibly secure and always available. Things like that. We had Internet (at my previous Sample Charter school). Internet was out in my last school, the air-conditioning-- I love it (Sample Charter). I'm not throwing it under the bus, but they're not as established, so they're still things figuring out, "How do we support? What does it look like?" Everything from a subsystem, to the air conditioning control, to the lunch. Sample District is a well-established school district that has all that on lock.

The example above again articulates benefits of the partnership that are often taken for granted in a fully developed district public school system. Highly functioning structures and systems maintaining the function of facilities, planning, and plant management can be critical to a successful district/charter collaborative.

### **Function VIII: Accountability, information management, and technology services.**

This function addresses the systems and structures necessary for managing, monitoring, and ensuring the successful implementation of state and federal accountability measures. This benefitted Sample District in the collaborative and was a significant impetus for the exploration and fulfillment of this partnership. This section will describe the ways in which the two entities have collaborated regarding accountability measures.

#### ***Exchange.***

This function is an area where District Middle School received substantial exchange for what it contributed to the collaborative in previously discussed functions. An impetus for the collaborative was as a means of improving student outcomes. Mr. Jefferson, a system level leader from Sample Charter, explains the agreement:

These kids are their kids, for accountability's sake, to the Sample District students, any test results that we get, any academic performance or gains that we get are credited to Sample District, so in the eyes of Texas, the only accountability is for District Middle School, anything that we are able to do in our programming, benefits the district and affects the school as a whole.

This is a structure that was set up intentionally to create an equal collaborative exchange between the two entities.

Fortunately, District Middle School has received the intended benefit in terms of accountability. Mr. Snow, principal for Charter Middle, states, “we are still 10 to 15 percentage points in every tested subject above where District Middle performs, and so I still think we provide that to make sure that we're staying out of IR.”



Mr. Yen, a district level leader for Sample District, explains how the collaborative led to Sample District adopting a new formative assessment tool for district-wide implementation and accountability:

Sample Charter has been using the map assessment for several years. Two years ago, our Sample District/Charter Collaborative principals asked if they could pilot the map. Last year, twenty-three schools in Sample District were using the map assessment. This year, every child K-8 is taking the map assessment three times during the academic year. The way that we're using the map assessment to shape and drive a personalized experience for kids is exciting.

The agreed-upon exchange of ideas promotes a fair negotiation that allows Sample District to rely heavily on the skills and assets that Sample Charter brings to the collaborative.

### ***Negotiation.***

Sample Charter came to the collaborative with a track record of success in accountability areas that were a struggle for Sample District. This asset of Sample Charter's plays well into a needed negotiation element for Sample District. This negotiation is explicitly laid out in the collaborative's contract. The document states:

It is expected that the Charter Middle School Program provided under this Contract will cause the accountability rating of Sample District students enrolled in Charter Middle School to improve and accordingly, the campus-wide rating for Sample District/Charter Collaborative to improve. In the event that the performance of the Charter Middle School students under the Accountability Standards has an adverse effect on the overall Sample District/Charter Collaborative campus-wide accountability ratings in any given school year, in lieu of termination as set forth in

this Contract, the Parties may assess the cause of the adverse effect on the campus-wide rating and agree upon an improvement plan designed to reverse the lowered accountability rating.

The contract sets an expectation of high-stakes accountability and establishes role differentiation and trust amongst the two parties which strongly encourages Charter Middle to deliver on its part of the negotiation.

Ms. Thatcher, a campus level leader at Charter Middle, believes her school's involvement in the partnership is having the intended impact; "My understanding is that since we've been here, especially in the last two years, data has improved, which I think leads to, I don't know how to pinpoint that, but I think the partnership is helping." Ms. Sale, a district level leader at Sample District agrees, if you look at the longitudinal data, they (Charter Middle) have really benefited us (District Middle) in terms of accountability."

### ***Role differentiation.***

Document 1 of the collaborative created a working group for this function during the formation of the partnership. The working group collaborated on three objectives in relation to this function: (1) Re-evaluate curriculum and assessment to monitor student performance and college readiness; (2) Annually monitor student performance and accountability; (3) Research student success points annually to ensure college readiness.

Each school system in the partnership placed key personnel on the critical working group from both system and campus level leadership positions. Document 1 goes on to mandate, "Sample District and Sample Charter will openly share student performance data as a measure of progress and establish a common longitudinal data system."

These ideals and objectives are reinforced by the legally binding contract of Sample District/Charter Collaborative, which states, “Review of Accountability Data. Charter Middle School accountability data will be combined with the accountability data for the remainder of the Sample District/Charter Collaborative campus for purposes of a campus-wide accountability rating.” Additionally, the document articulates the following in regards to student testing:

Students enrolled at Charter Middle School shall participate in all statewide student testing as required by Applicable Law. Sample District and Charter Middle School will collaborate on the timing, manner, and location for testing of Charter Middle School students. All test data for students enrolled in Charter Middle School shall be aggregated with the data for all other District Middle School students for purposes of campus accountability ratings.

These documents clarify the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in the partnership and what they should expect from each other, which is a critical component of establishing a trusting collaborative relationship.

### ***Trust.***

Ms. Retz, principal of District Middle, articulates how clarity of role differentiation in the contract and Document 1 lead to a trusting relationship that allowed for a productive partnership. She explains:

All of the students at District Middle and Charter Middle are actually Spring Branch students and all fall under the school number of District Middle... I think that's one of the-- probably the single most important thing that makes our initiative work. Because there's no incentive to collaborate otherwise, which is a lot to begin with. Now there's an incentive to collaborate, and without that, there's not.

The trust that Ms. Retz articulates above is critical to the successful implementation of the partnership and speaks to the importance of clear and thorough guiding documents like the Sample District/Charter Collaborative Contract.

In addition to a contract including with clarity of roles and accountability, Sample Charter offers a proven track record of high academic achievement data to the partnership. Ms. Apple, a teacher at Charter Middle, explains, “Charter Middle has proven to be successful with their academic program.” Ms. Vargas, a district level leader for Sample Charter provides further evidence: “Across the years, most regularly our math and science classroom have improved the overall average score on STAAR tests at the end of the year for the accountability rating for the campus.” Lastly, Mr. Jefferson, a system level leader for Sample Charter, echoes the other Sample Charter employees, “I believe, our existence and our participation (in the collaborative) has been able to help keep that school (District Middle) out of Improvement Required.”

Entering a collaborative with a partner who has a track record of academic success is critical. In this case it allowed Sample Charter and Sample District to begin their collaborative with a trusting relationship and transparently offer strengths.

#### **Function IX: External and internal communications.**

This function supports all communications, both internal and external, within the school system. There are two provisions for collaborative communication in the Sample District/Charter Collaborative contract. The first is in regards to parent communication:

The Parties agree that if an incident occurs that would necessitate communications to parents of students enrolled in the Charter Middle School Program, the District Middle School Principal and the Charter Middle School Director will collaborate on the communication and prepare a joint communication as appropriate.

Additionally, the following excerpt can be found in the contract in regards to The second addresses media requests:

Media Requests. The Parties agree to collaborate regarding any media requests or press releases related to Charter Middle School, the students enrolled in the Charter Middle School Program, or the Sample District/Charter Collaborative, prior to responding to any media request or making a press release and further agree that any statement made will have prior approval by the Superintendent for each Party or their designee.

These two excerpts, while limited, do provide important guidelines for collaboration that ensure a fair exchange and provide for clear role differentiation. The only participant who mentioned anything linked to the communication function was Charter System level leader, Mr. Jefferson. He mentioned communication during a crisis can be complicated by the collaborative relationship. Because his school is under the jurisdiction of another district, necessary communication regarding the other district's building concerns can be difficult, in spite of a shared sense of responsibility. He shared the following:

I think the other thing (in regards to sacrifices) to think about is that when there's a crisis going down, that means I got ten more calls to make because if we're closing buildings, I have to think, "Oh, what is Sample District doing? Have they messaged it accordingly? Are they closing or are we close? Are we both open? Are they open? Are they scheduled the same as our schedule? Do they have this calendar?" There's just a little bit more coordination.

While the extra coordination of effective communication can be both cumbersome and difficult, no participant mentioned it being a deal killer in terms of the collaborative.

It does; however, require a collaborative relationship built on trust in order to negotiate the situation effectively.

### **Function X: Operations and support.**

This function supports the day-to-day non-instructional processes of the school system. Some sub-functions might include: safety and security, food services, transportation, health services, etc.

#### ***Exchange.***

This function highlights an area where Sample Charter reaps many benefits as a result of membership in the collaborative. Ms. Retz, principal of District Middle, explains that the size and longevity of Sample District provides Charter Middle with assets it would not normally have:

I think they benefit from a lot of the infrastructure stuff that, for example, larger—Sample District is not that big, right? But a mid-sized school district has as a part of their regular day-to-day function, yes. They would benefit from like food services, transportation, and all of that stuff.

Ms. Thatcher, a leader from Charter Middle, concurs with Ms. Retz, and provided us an example of what that looks like in the day-to-day workings of the school. Ms. Thatcher said, “Sample District is a well-established school district that has all that on lock, so our kids have better food options here, therefore our kids are eating more, therefore they're less likely to be hungry in the day.”

#### ***Negotiation.***

As previously mentioned, this is a function where the negotiated collaborative advantage goes to Charter Middle School in exchange for negotiated assets in previous

functions. Mr. Jefferson, a system level leader for Sample Charter, explains the many benefits his organization gains as a result of participation in the collaborative, “They (Sample District) also provide tangibly, the shared services, so they provide transportation, they provide food, they provide nursing services, all those things are tangible benefits.”

These well-established operational services are critical to the success of the collaborative and the terms for these services are clearly detailed in the collaborative’s contract.

***Role differentiation and trust.***

These two elements of collaboration are placed together for this function because reliance on one another is vital. This section will provide the details of role differentiation found in the contract and then provide another example of how it has manifested itself in the partnership.

The Sample District/Charter Collaborative contract confirms the aforementioned exchange occurring between the two school systems. The document provides detailed provisions regarding collaboration pertaining to the operational and support services including:

**(1) Counseling Services:**

Except as expressly stated in this Contract, Sample District certified counselors assigned to District Middle School and all related counseling services available to Sample District students who attend District Middle School will be made available to Charter Middle School students during the District Middle School regular school day to the same extent and in the same manner to students enrolled in District Middle School.

**(2) Study Trips:**

Sample District agrees to provide transportation for study trips, non-Program activities, Sample District electives, and extra-curricular activities for Charter Middle School students to the same extent and same manner as Sample District provides for other Sample District students. Additionally, Charter Middle School may utilize the Charter Middle School instructional Program.

(3) Transportation Services:

Sample District agrees to provide transportation services to and from an approved Sample District bus stop and District Middle School in accordance with the Charter Middle School calendar to students enrolled in Charter Middle School who reside within the District Middle School attendance zone to the same extent and same manner as Sample District provides to other Sample District students who reside within the District Middle School attendance zone.

(4) Police services: “The Parties agree that the Sample District Police Department will provide certain services to Charter Middle School and that the Parties will collaborate on the type and extent of such services.”

And (5) Child Nutrition Services:

Free and Reduced Lunch. Sample District will provide child nutrition services, including all free and reduced-price breakfast, lunch, and snack programs and other available federally funded services for which Charter Middle School students qualify, for Charter Middle School students.

The above operation and support services are critical to the productivity of the partnership. As the participants pointed out, these are not services generally provided at other Sample Charter schools, therefore, the explicit detail of role differentiation in reference to these services is critical for successful exchange, negotiation, and trust building in the partnership.



One example of how the clear role differentiation allowed for trust is through a recent field trip the two schools took together. Ms. Olden, a leader for District Middle School, shared the following about a recent field trip her school organized: “We just went on a career day field trip that the district sponsored and the Charter Middle kids went as well as we did and we have another field trip coming up that we will do together.” Trust, in this example, led to shared activities successful shared activities that motivated plans for future collaboration.

## **SUMMARY**

Chapter four explored the findings from a qualitative exploratory case study of Sample District/Charter Collaborative. Semi-structured interviews, reflective journaling and memoing were the primary data sources used in this research. The codes of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust were taken from social exchange theory and used to analyze the data and the results were organized into themes take from Olivarez’s (2013) ten functions of school districts. The data collected, and the subsequent organization into codes and themes, provided evidence of collaboration to varying degrees across each of the ten functions. Additionally, the organization of the data analyzed the balance and equity of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust within in each of the ten functions. Chapter five will further discuss the findings from chapter four and share recommendations and implications for school districts, charter systems, and school leaders who are considering collaborative partnerships.

## **Chapter Five: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations**

Chapter five presents the findings, implications, and recommendations of this study. Additionally, this chapter will provide an overview of the problem statement, the purpose, and the methodology used in this study. The findings will be presented in three sections. Section one will provide a summary of the results for each of the three research questions used in this study. Section two will address implications for current and future school system leaders considering collaborative partnerships with other school systems. Finally, section three will provide recommendations for future research.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In regards to the coexistence of traditional district schools and charter schools, the paradigm of competition still dominates the educational marketplace. Many argue the influx of charter schools and voucher systems into the market place is good for all students as it causes the quality of education in all school systems to rise (Hoxby, 2003; Betts and Loveless, 2005). Other scholars argue the impact of increased competition is, at best, minimal (Eastman, Anderson, and Boyles, 2016; Jabbar, 2015; Maranto, Millman, and Hess, 2001; Knack and Knack, 2013). While the paradigm of competition has existed for roughly thirty years, the idea of collaboration is in its infancy and still lacks a significant body of research.

One early study shows encouraging signs that collaboratives can be effective and mutually benefit all parties involved (DeArmond, Nelson, and Bruns, 2015). As more collaborative models emerge we are compelled to study them and determine the benefits, hardships, and impact they have on educators and students.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to explore a collaborative partnership in Southeast Texas between a public district school and a public charter school in order to determine what leadership and organizational issues and benefits arise as a result of said partnership. Additionally, this study surfaced participant perceptions about the partnership and identified evidence of the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation within Olivarez's (2013) ten functions of school districts. Finally, this single exploratory case study deepens the pool of literature on collaborative efforts between public district schools and public charter schools, identified pitfalls and easy wins for superintendents considering collaborative partnerships, and raises additional questions for future study in regards to district and charter collaborative efforts.

## **METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW**

For the purpose of this single exploratory case study, the constructionist epistemological stance was used. The constructionist epistemological stance asserts that meaning is not discovered or predicted but people construct meaning as they engage with the world around them (Crotty, 1998). This exploratory case study sought to understand how participants construct their reality as they experienced collaboration with another educational entity. Crotty (1998) argues constructionism addresses reality that is constructed by the interaction of humans and their world, making this a logical epistemological choice for an exploratory study seeking to understand behavior within a collaborative environment.

A case study is an inquiry method that explores a bounded contemporary phenomenon under real world circumstances through the collection of multiple data sources (Yin, 2009; Stake, 2005). Yin (2009) adds case studies have more variables of

interest than data points and each result relies on multiple triangulated pieces of evidence. In this particular study, collaboration was the phenomenon of focus. The lack of extensive preliminary research on collaboration in the marketplace is an impetus for this study and provides ideal conditions for an exploratory case study (Streb, 2012). Exploratory case studies are most applicable when there is a lack of preliminary research on a topic and when there is a need to define questions and hypothesis for consecutive studies (Streb, 2012; Yin, 2009).

Data collected for this case study was a combination of interviews, organizational documents, and reflective journaling and memoing. Interviews were all digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim using Gotranscript, and uploaded in Dedoose for analysis. Policy documents were also uploaded into Dedoose for analysis and coding. Codes included the elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation from social exchange theory. Codes were then organized, described, and explained by themes taken from Olivarez's (2013) ten functions of school districts.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The research on competitive markets in education indicates that the impact of competition in the educational marketplace on school quality is minimal at best. Regardless, competition in the marketplace, especially from charter schools, remains popular. Therefore, there are implications for leaders of both school districts and charter networks to further explore more fruitful options of coexistence, including the idea of working collaboratively in some shape or form. Further research is needed to determine the effects of district-charter collaborative models so school leaders from both the charter and traditional district world can make informed decisions as they work together. As

collaborative models take hold it is imperative that these efforts are successful and result in greater school success for all parties involved.

Additionally, this study was needed due to the minimal available literature on district-charter partnerships when compared to available literature on competition. This broadens the literature base so future researchers and practitioners can be better informed as they proceed with their work. Lastly, this study highlighted participant perceptions about partnerships and evidence of the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, trust, and role differentiation within each of the ten functions of school districts. This will be helpful for district and charter leaders as they consider partnerships in the future.

#### **SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This single exploratory case study used a constructionist epistemological stance and a theoretical perspective of Interpretivism to answer the research questions in the following sub-sections for Charter Middle School and District Middle School in Sample District/Carter Collaborative.

##### **Research question one.**

This research question asked: To what extent are the collaborative elements of exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust evident in each of the ten functions of school districts? Figure 2, titled Spectrum of Collaboration within the Framework of District Functions and Leadership Competencies of School Superintendents, gives an overview of the level of collaboration occurring in this case study. While the following sections go into detail about each of the ten functions, figure 2 gives a summary of collaboration in the partnership and places each function on a spectrum, moving from left to right, from little collaboration to extensive collaboration.

Spectrum of Collaboration within the FRAMEWORK OF DISTRICT FUNCTIONS AND LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS			
<div> <div></div> Collaboration in Sample District/Charter Collaborative </div>			
Little Collaboration	Some Collaboration	Moderate Collaboration	Extensive Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications</li> <li>Governance Operations</li> <li>Campus Operations</li> <li>Administrative, finance, and business operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum and Instruction</li> <li>Human Resources</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructional support services</li> <li>Facilities and Plant Services</li> <li>Operations and support.</li> <li>Accountability</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Spectrum of Collaboration within the Framework of District Functions and Leadership Competencies of School Superintendents (Olivarez, 2013).

***Function I: Governance operations.***

The function of governance operations refers to the responsibilities and duties of school boards, superintendents, and their leadership teams. There was little collaboration in regards to governance in the day-to-day functioning of the collaborative studied in this case. However, the school board, superintendent, and executive level leadership team are critical to the success of a district/charter collaborative. It takes vision from the highest levels of leadership to explore and bring to fruition such a collaborative. Mr. Jefferson, a district level leader at Sample Charter explained, “When the former superintendent of

Sample District left, I think that there were some question marks with the partners because he was such an ardent champion for the portfolio model and for this partnership, and he was such a key figure getting it off the ground.”

This vision manifested itself through clear role differentiation in the foundational and guiding documents of the collaborative. Document 1, described in detail in the previous chapter, is the pseudonym for a document outlining why and how the partnership was conceived, its goals, the stakeholders involved, and the description of their formational work. Document 1 and the legal contract, which outline the binding parameters of the partnership, required tremendous amounts of collaboration. The collaboration to create these founding documents was orchestrated by working groups engaged in a yearlong collaborative process involving key organizational areas.

This level of coordination requires oversight and direction from the superintendent and his/her leadership team. Additionally, it requires the support of the school board as a meaningful and viable strategy for achieving district-wide strategic goals.

One final area of collaboration in this function can come in the form of joint advocacy. District level leaders from both organizations have leveraged their partner to advocate collectively at the state and federal level for shared interests. Joining forces and arguing together for the same outcome can be powerful in the mind of a politician or lobbyist and brings the additional benefit of thought partners for strategy and approach.

### ***Function II: Curriculum and instruction.***

The curriculum and instruction function refers to the planning, execution, and monitoring of the overall academic program. Data showed some collaboration around the curriculum and instruction function in Sample District/Charter Collaborative. When forming the partnership, a working group of executive level leaders was selected to execute

this function. The group included academic achievement outcomes within the overarching goals and purpose of the partnership. Ultimately, I found that explicit collaboration over the academic program had not widely found its way into the day-to-day functioning of the partnership.

Participants shared how their personal practice or mindset shifted as a result of their participation in the partnership. There was little to no evidence, however, of educators sitting down to plan common assessments, lesson plans, or share curricular resources. When pushed as to why this was not happening, one teacher responded that there was no time for it. She mentioned she would love to know what they (teachers at District Middle) were doing; however, she barely had time to collaborate with teachers from her own school much less teachers from the partner school.

While I was initially frustrated to find so little collaboration around curriculum and instruction, I came to realize perhaps the necessary negotiation and exchange needs of the partners in the collaborative was fulfilled without the explicit inclusion of this function. However, it remains an area for future exploration in subsequent studies.

### ***Function III: Campus operations.***

The campus operations function refers to the planning and monitoring of success for all students across all sub-populations and special programs at all campuses. Campus operations were an area of little collaboration in the partnership. While, independently, each of these school systems have dynamic structures in place for managing this function, it is not an area of extensive collaboration in the partnership. The little collaboration occurring mostly involved campus master scheduling and district level thinking.

The campus principals at the two schools in the collaborative created a structure for weekly leadership meetings to design a master schedule prioritizing their overarching goals



and initiatives. The result was a schedule that worked for both schools to maximize instructional time, access to common spaces, and availability of extracurricular, and co-curricular activities. Having two trusting principals commit to the collaborative enough to negotiate a fair exchange was key to the success of Sample District/Charter Collaborative.

Additionally, one Sample District level leader brought up two recent examples of additional collaboration with other system level leaders from Sample Charter. This was a collaborative window opened as a result of the partnership. Had the two systems not been in the partnership, there would not have been the opportunity to share possible solutions regarding a system wide problem. The trust built as a result of the collaborative allows for greater access to resources and think partners. Two examples from this case were a new initiative to train assistant principals together using Sample Charter's training program. The second was the sharing of system of formative/common assessments to drive student outcomes.

#### ***Function IV: Instructional support services.***

This function manages the many additional services needed in a school system to support the instructional program. This function was an area of extensive collaboration in the partnership and could be a foundational area for any districts/charters looking to partner. The instructional support services were a huge asset Sample District brought to the negotiating table from the onset of the collaborative. Students in Sample District/Charter Collaborative were able to experience library services, food services, transportation services, electives, and extracurricular activities at a level unparalleled in any of the other charter schools in Sample Charter School Network.

While the instructional support services resulted in a huge level of positive exchange and negotiation for Charter Middle, District Middle, and its district, also

benefitted greatly. This function requires a strong infrastructure to build and maintain and that infrastructure requires significant funding. Additionally, funding, made possible via the extra students from Charter Middle, make the level of support service options viable. The two form a symbiotic relationship and provide an example of a great negotiating point for future systems looking to form collaboratives.

***Function V: Human resources.***

This function deals with all aspects of employee relations in the school system. This was an area of some collaboration in the partnership. A truth of this collaborative is the systems involved in initially came together around their strengths. One strength of Sample Charter System was their approach to growing and developing teachers and school leaders. This was an area that has been leveraged by the partnership and has grown into a tangible area of collaboration. Currently the two systems in the collaborative collectively have more than twenty assistant principals in a principal training program.

Sample District/Charter Collaborative did not necessarily force collaboration in this area but found the strength of one of the partners to negotiate a mutually beneficial exchange. The strength of Sample Charter was identified from the onset and language was placed in the partnership's contract allowing for sharing of ideas and practices involving leadership and teacher development.

***Function VI: Administrative, finance, and business operations.***

This function overseas the planning, management, and oversight of all system level finances. Function VI was an area of little collaboration in the partnership. This case study found the two school systems in this partnership were extremely transparent and detailed about the financial exchange from the beginning and memorialized the negotiated

exchange in the founding contract of the collaborative. The contract called for a flat rate to be paid by Sample District to Sample Charter on a per student basis. The rate would not carry any weights based on special populations, but be the same for all students attending Charter Middle School. After the fourth year of the partnership the two entities come together annually to re-negotiate the rate to be paid to Sample Charter.

Both of the system level leaders interviewed for this study expressed some distress over the agreed upon financial agreement. They felt perhaps a weighted student allocation should be applied to provide funding for students in special populations. Ultimately, despite this concern, all parties continue with the partnership and seem pleased with the overall negotiated exchange.

***Function VII: Facilities and plant services.***

This function handles the planning, building, and upkeep of all district facilities. This function was one of extensive collaboration in the partnership and an incredibly important area for Sample Charter. Charters do not generally receive adequate state or federal funding for facilities and often are left with facilities far inferior to those of traditional school districts. Sample District/Charter Collaborative provides a tremendous opportunity for Charter Middle School to share in the rich facility resources of District Middle School.

As an agreement of Sample District/Charter Collaborative Sample District agreed to provide and maintain all facilities necessary for Charter Middle School to function. This included the school structure, classrooms, furniture, technology, Internet, electrical, and other utility infrastructure and access. These services and assets were provided to Charter Middle School at a level greater than is common at other Sample Charter Network schools. This was one of the greatest negotiating strengths of Sample District in the creation of the

collaborative and is the single greatest asset gained for Sample Charter as a result of participation.

***Function VIII: Accountability, information management, and technology services.***

This function addresses the systems and structures necessary for managing, monitoring, and ensuring the successful implementation of state and federal accountability measures. This function, as an area of extensive collaboration, represents the greatest element of negotiation for Sample Charter and is the greatest asset Sample District receives in the collaborative exchange.

Prior to the collaborative District Middle School was in academic accountability and enrollment trouble. These concerns had manifested themselves years earlier in a temporary school closing. Since its reopening, District Middle struggled with academic achievement and struggled to maintain a viable level of enrollment given the size of the building. Sample District leaders sought a partner to assist with both of these elements as strengths; since the partnership the accountability and overall enrollment of both schools has risen tremendously.

Additionally, system level leaders made clear the academic achievement expectations in the collaborative contract. The language specifically states, “It is expected that the Charter Middle School Program provided under this Contract will cause the accountability rating of Sample District students enrolled in Charter Middle School to improve and accordingly, the campus-wide rating for Sample District/Charter Collaborative to improve.” This language is explicit and led to further levels of trust between the two organizations in the partnership founded in these negotiated outcomes.

***Function IX: External and internal communications.***

This function supports all communications, both internal and external, within the school system. This was an area of very little collaboration between the two school systems; however, there was language addressing the coordination of communication for the partnership school in the event of an incident. Little other data became available and therefore provided no adequate findings for the function.

***Function X: Operations and support.***

This function supports the day-to-day non-instructional working of the school system. Extensive collaboration between the two schools in Sample District/Charter Collaborative occurred in this area. This is another function where Sample Charter leverages assets from Sample District in exchange for partnership in the collaborative. Sample District is a large school system serving more than 30,000 students district wide. With a district of that size comes sizable, efficient, and fully built to scale operation and support systems. These are systems that all Sample Charter employees referenced during interviews as major advantages of the partnership. Specifically, Charter Middle School students and employees were able to take advantage of police services, health screenings, school nurse services, and bus transportation

When exploring future collaborative efforts, the operations and support function will be a key negotiating piece for the better-established school system in the partnership. In Sample District/Charter Collaborative clear guidelines and expectations were established in the legal contract, creating a foundation for trusting and clearly defined collaboration.

## **Research question two.**

This research question asked: What do district-charter collaborative participants perceive about the influence of collaboration on school success? The results of this study showed all participants interviewed perceived their school's membership in Sample District/Charter Collaborative positively impacted student success. However, participants defined school success in a variety of ways. System level leaders tended to define school success based on the functional goals set by the departments they led. For example, one system level leader defined success based on enrollment numbers since that was a major component of his job description. Campus leaders tended to define school success in terms of the overall academic program or state accountability and teachers defined school success as a combination of academic success coupled with shaping students of good moral character.

Regardless of how each stakeholder group defined success, the results showed each group perceived their participation in the collaborative was positively impacting school success. District level leaders from Sample Charter shared how the partnership allowed them to expand their footprint and grow the organization with higher quality facilities than usual. This in turn allowed them to increase their bottom line and increase the number of students they are able to serve across the city. Sample District level leaders, along with School level leaders, appreciated having additional thought partners in the daily work of running a school. Results showed the ability to share ideas and work through problems benefited the perception of success in the community.

Teachers echoed similar perceptions about the impact on school success. Specifically, one added the partnership led to District Middle School coming off the state's Improvement Required list. Another shared her perception the partnership was a benefit

for the students they served and perceived the partnership was positively impacting student success.

The findings of this single exploratory case study found that all interviewed participants perceived Sample District/Charter Collaborative has positive impacts on their definition of school success. While their definitions may vary, this is encouraging data for school system leaders to consider as they explore collaborations with other school systems.

### **Research question three.**

This research question asked: What changes have school leaders and teachers made to their practice as a result of their participation in a district-charter partnership? System level leaders struggled to articulate any personal changes they had made to their professional practice as a result of the partnership. One leader mentioned a “pre-tactical” change the organization made to the academic calendar in order to better align with the calendar of the partner. I fear the lack of results may have resulted from my limitations as a researcher to clarify my question and/or ask good follow up questions in the semi-structured interviews.

Findings from campus level leaders revealed a bit more change in regards to professional practice. Mr. Snow, school leader of Charter Middle, responded he made significant changes to his mindset regarding the best ways of educating children and his perceptions of district schools. Additionally, he added he had significantly increased the integration of technology into the curriculum as a result of the partnership. A school leader from District Middle echoed Mr. Snow’s change in mindset by adding the partnership had changed the way she treats people and she now engages in the work with greater enthusiasm and joy.

Findings from the study revealed teachers made the most significant changes to personal practice. A teacher from Charter Middle became more willing to take risks with curriculum, seating arrangements, and planning as a result of participation in the collaborative. Another teacher, from District Middle, explained in her first year she learned several planning and instructional strategies from teachers in Charter Middle she now utilized to improve the school's test scores.

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

This study will add significant literature to the body of work on emerging collaborative models between school systems. A variety of schools systems exist in the marketplace and provide a wealth of choice to the communities they serve. Consequently, this study proves choice does not have to come at the expense of collaboration. This study provides a body of literature to support school boards and system leaders exploring partnerships with competing school systems. Additionally, this study offers the following recommendations for prospective school boards and system leaders contemplating collaborative partnerships.

#### **Start from the strengths of each organization and make students the first priority.**

One of the opening statements in Document 1 states, "Our union will leverage the collective strengths of each Sample District/Charter Collaborative partner organization to maximize achievement for under-served students." The school's systems in this collaborative came together around their strengths, thus beginning the partnership from a growth mindset as opposed to a deficit mindset, which made it possible to put student achievement as their first priority. Sample District provided clear structures for facilities and maintenance, instructional support services, and operations and support while Sample



Charter brought a proven track record of high accountability performance in areas Sample District was lacking. When school systems enter a collaborative from a position of strength, it is easier to build trust, define clear role differentiation, and negotiate an exchange where both parties feel they are both offering and gaining something significant. Additionally, keeping student performance as a north star for the collaborative ensures decisions are made for the collective good of all families served by the partnership.

**Be intentional about building trust and relationships.**

This study found one reason for the success of this collaborative in this case was the intentional building of trust and relationships from day one. Document one memorializes a yearlong process of working groups coming together on a consistent basis to negotiate an equitable exchange in the collaborative. Working groups were formed around the ten functions, they set goals, kept minutes for their meetings, were responsible for deliverables, and ultimately reached agreements that benefited both organizations and the students the collaborative would serve. A system level leader from Sample District shared he felt the coming together of stakeholders through the working group process was crucial to building a trusting and successful relationship between the systems in the partnership.

**Use the ten functions as a framework for collaboration.**

The ten functions offer an organized framework for making sense of a potential school system partnership. While Sample District and Sample Charter did not name the ten functions per se, the working group areas were formed around the same key areas of work in school systems. Starting from a framework like the ten functions makes it easy for school systems to identify areas of strengths, areas of weakness, areas of collaboration,

and areas the systems would like to keep separate. Once a framework of collaboration is established, partners should draft a transparent and specific contractual agreement and/or guiding document for the work.

**Memorialize the partnership transparently and specifically in a guiding document and/or legal contract.**

As discussed in chapter four, Sample District/Charter Collaborative has two foundational documents. Document 1 memorializes the exploration and foundation of the partnership while the legal contract memorializes the legal agreement and expectations of the partnership. This case study found both of these documents were extremely transparent about all four of the elements of collaboration (exchange, negotiation, role differentiation, and trust) discussed in this paper. The clear set of expectations and highlighting of system strengths led to little ambiguity about roles and responsibilities within the partnership.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

While many studies exist exploring a variety of aspects of competition between school systems, there are far fewer studies exploring collaboration amongst school systems. One area for future study could explore the power of joint advocacy. One participant of this study mentioned the advantage of having a school district and a charter system advocate collectively on the behalf of students. This study did not fully uncover the breadth and impact of that collective advocacy; however, it is an interesting area to study that could lead to opportunities for collective benefits for charter and district school systems.

A second area of further research could be a mixed methods study on Sample District/Charter Collaborative that brought in quantitative student achievement data. It may provide further evidence to the effectiveness of partnerships and provide empirical evidence of their impact on student outcomes.

A final area of study, not necessarily linked to District/Charter partnerships, could be around Olivarez's (2013) Framework of District Functions and Leadership Competencies of School Superintendents. It would be helpful if more studies further identified and explored the functions and sub-functions of school systems. More literature on the topic could provide clarity in this area and be helpful to future researchers trying to use the ten functions as a framework.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Teacher Interview Protocol**

#### **Introduction**

1. Describe your current role at your campus. Have you held other roles on this campus?
2. How long have you been in the current role?
3. How would you describe your roles and responsibilities in your current role on your campus?
4. How would you describe the current partnership that exists between your school and the other school on this campus?
5. How would you describe the goals or purpose of the partnership between the two schools that exist on this campus?

#### **Exchange**

6. How would you describe the relationship between the two schools in this partnership?
7. What benefits, if any, do you believe your school reaps as a result of its membership in the collaborative partnership?
8. What does your school contribute to the collaborative partnership?
9. What benefits, if any, does the other school in the partnership reap as a result of your school's participation?

#### **Negotiation**

10. What specific skills or assets does your school bring to the partnership?
11. What sacrifices does your school make in order to participate in this partnership?
12. How would you describe the give and take between your school and the other school in the partnership? Is the exchange fair or lopsided? Explain.

#### **Trust**

13. How would you describe the level of trust that exists between your school and the other school in the partnership?
14. How would you describe the impact the partnership has risk taking and innovation in your school? Can you give some examples?

#### **Role differentiation**

15. What are the expectations of your school in the partnership?
16. What are the expectations of the other school in the collaborative?
17. Do your respective roles support the realization of group goals in the partnership?

#### **Other**

18. How do you define success for your school?
19. How has membership in this partnership impacted success for your school?

20. Have you made changes to your professional practice as a result of participation in this partnership? Please be specific.

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